



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

WEDNESDAY — 17 Nov 2021



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	11/16 Clean up begins as water recedes
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/clean-up-begins-water-recedes/IENZE7GFVHW3MBWLJDNKZ2W4Y/
GIST	<p>Even with rivers still flowing well over their banks, parts of western Washington are able to start the cleanup.</p> <p>“There’s just now way to keep enough equipment to be able to handle a situation like this,” says Gavin Green who has been helping customers pick up the pieces. After 19 years of repairing water damage, he says he’s never seen it this bad.</p> <p>“This is the first time I’ve seen the river go this high, the first time I’ve seen this much damage from river flooding.”</p> <p>With at least 500 families displaced by the floods, Whatcom County leaders are now trying to make sure residents there have someplace safe to stay. However, the flooding is still a major concern.</p> <p>“We do have continuing flooding down at the mouth of the river. We’re hoping that by midnight we have the river close to back to its banks, and we begin the cleanup,” says John Gargett, the Deputy Director of the Whatcom County Sheriff Office of Emergency Management.</p> <p>Local officials say they wont know how much damage was done until the water completely recedes, but they know it will cost millions to rebuild.</p> <p>With so many roads washed out, the commute around the area will also be impacted for some time.</p> <p>Jon Hutchings is the Director of the Whatcom County Public Works Department. He says part of Birch Bay Lynden Road was destroyed, adding “We’ll keep that closed for a matter of weeks at least until we can geta reasonable repair done.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Nearly 50,000 without power after storm
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/nearly-50k-still-have-no-power-after-washington-state-storm
GIST	<p>BELLINGHAM, Wash. (AP) — Nearly 50,000 Washington state electrical customers still had no power Tuesday after days of heavy rain triggered mudslides and floods and forced the closure of the West Coast's main north-south highway near the Canadian border, officials said.</p> <p>The rains caused by an atmospheric river — a huge plume of moisture extending over the Pacific and into Washington and Oregon — was easing and road crews managed to reopen southbound lanes of Interstate 5 near Bellingham, Washington. But the highway's northbound lanes were still closed in the area.</p> <p>At the height of the storm, about 158,000 electrical customers on Monday had no power and schools in the city of Bellingham were closed on Tuesday for the second day in a row.</p> <p>North of Bellingham, authorities said one person was still missing Tuesday after being seen in floodwaters clinging to a tree.</p> <p>And a motorist in Bellingham was injured when a tree fell on a vehicle. Evacuations were ordered in multiple areas as floodwaters swamped business districts and partially submerged cars in communities north of Seattle and winds gusted at speeds of 60 mph (96 kph), including one gust of 58 mph (93 kph) at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.</p> <p>Forecasters predicted drier conditions on Tuesday but the National Weather Service issued flood warnings for several rivers around western Washington. Early Tuesday the National Weather Service said there was</p>

good news in that the Skagit River at Mount Vernon would crest at near 36 feet (11 meters) - more than a foot below the previous estimate.

Gov. Jay Inslee declared a severe weather state of emergency in 14 counties and said the state Emergency Management Division, with support from the Washington National Guard, would coordinate the response.

In the town of Hamilton about 80 miles (129 kilometers) northeast of Seattle, cars and trailers were packed into the parking lot outside the Red Cross evacuation site at Hamilton Baptist Church, where dozens of residents are waiting out the storm, the Skagit Valley Herald reported.

Skagit County officials compared the flood to severe flooding in 2009, when the Skagit and Samish rivers overflowed and caused damage to homes, farms and infrastructure,

As the water made its way down the swollen Skagit River, people were warned to expect flooding and evacuation orders for other communities.

And just south of the Canadian border in the community of Sumas, Washington, officials said city hall was flooded in a soaking that reminded people of severe floods in 1990.

Deputies evacuated stranded residents and the person who was still missing had been swept away by floodwaters after being seen holding on to the tree, said police from the small city of Everson in Facebook posting. The motorist injured in Bellingham was seriously hurt early Monday while traveling on Interstate 5.

Bellingham's record rainfall on Sunday totaled 2.78 inches (7 centimeters), crushing the prior daily record from 1998 of 0.88 inches (2.2 centimeters), according to the National Weather Service. Another 1.89 inches (4.8 centimeters) poured down on Bellingham on Monday.

West of Seattle on the Olympic Peninsula, several highways were partially closed and the U.S. Coast Guard helped local authorities evacuate about 10 people near the town of Forks. In nearby Quillayute, a daily record rainfall of 4.01 inches (10 centimeters) was set on Monday.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Germany: coronavirus situation dramatic
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-coronavirus-situation-is-dramatic-merkel-says-2021-11-17/
GIST	<p>BERLIN, Nov 17 (Reuters) - Germany's coronavirus situation is dramatic, Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Wednesday, calling for a push to distribute booster shots faster and appealing to those sceptical of vaccination to change their minds.</p> <p>Germany reported 52,826 new infections on Wednesday - a jump of a third compared with a week ago and another daily record, while 294 people died, bringing the total to 98,274, as the pandemic's fourth wave tightened its grip on Europe.</p> <p>"It is not too late to opt for a first vaccine shot," Merkel told a congress of German city mayors. "Everyone who gets vaccinated protects himself and others. And if enough people get vaccinated that is the way out of the pandemic."</p> <p>Only 68% of people in Europe's most populous country are fully vaccinated - lower than the average in western Europe due to a tradition of vaccine hesitancy, while 5% of the population has had a booster shot.</p> <p>Merkel, governing in a caretaker capacity during negotiations to form a coalition government after an election in September, said there needs to be a national effort to get mass distribution of vaccine booster shots underway.</p>

	<p>She also appealed to federal and regional leaders meeting on Thursday to introduce a measure that would trigger tighter restrictions based on the number of infected people who have to go to hospital in a week.</p> <p>Germany has enough doses for a booster campaign, in part because it has delayed plans to donate vaccines to the COVAX facility that distributes them to poorer countries, Health Minister Jens Spahn said.</p> <p>The Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats, who are negotiating to form the next government, are set to propose a range of measures to fight the pandemic in a draft law set to be voted on in parliament on Thursday.</p> <p>They want to force people using public transport or attending workplaces to provide a negative COVID-19 test, or proof of recovery or vaccination.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Europe natural gas prices soar
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russian-gas-flows-germany-via-yamal-pipeline-steady-after-nord-stream-2-setback-2021-11-17/
GIST	<p>MOSCOW/LONDON, Nov 17 (Reuters) - The price of natural gas surged again in Europe on Wednesday after a delay in the approval process for a major new pipeline from Russia exacerbated worries about whether the continent will have enough gas this winter.</p> <p>Germany's energy regulator suspended the process on Tuesday for bringing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline online, dimming hopes that it will provide any significant gas supplies in the coming months and sending jitters through energy markets.</p> <p>The price of gas next month in the Netherlands , which is considered to be a benchmark for Europe, jumped almost 8% on Wednesday to hit 101.30 euros per megawatt-hour (MWh), its highest since Oct. 18.</p> <p>The price of gas at the beginning of next year also rose, with the market not expecting any major flows through Nord Stream 2 until late in the coming winter heating season, by the time demand may have already peaked.</p> <p>"The timeline for the start of the pipe now appears longer than what we initially expected," analysts at Goldman Sachs wrote in a note, adding that they now expected it to be up and running only in February next year.</p> <p>The Dutch contract for gas in January leapt 7.8% to 101.61 euros per MWh on Wednesday while the British wholesale gas price contract for the first three months of 2022 surged almost 12% to 2.45 pounds per therm.</p> <p>European governments are scrambling to soften the blow for consumers and businesses alike with emergency measures such as price caps and subsidies. One of the world's biggest energy traders, Trafigura, also warned on Tuesday that Europe could face power outages this winter due to low supplies.</p> <p>FUELING INFLATION</p> <p>Higher energy prices in Europe and around the world are already feeding through to inflation rates, which may in turn push policymakers to raise interest rates sooner than expected.</p> <p>Data published on Wednesday showed inflation rates in both the European Union and Britain jumped above 4% in October, more than double central bank targets, with gas prices paid by British consumers, for example, sky-rocketing 28%.</p>

Gas prices in Europe, which gets a third of its gas from Russia, were also buoyed by a decline in exports this week from Norway, another key energy supplier to Britain and the European Union, due to maintenance work on its gas infrastructure.

Germany's energy regulator said it had halted the certification of Nord Stream 2 because the Swiss-based consortium behind the pipeline needed to form a German subsidiary under German law to secure an operating licence.

In the first comments since news of the delay broke, the Kremlin said the certification was a "complicated process" and that it did not see politics behind the decision. Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the consortium deals with requests from the German regulator in a timely fashion and Russia must be patient.

Russian gas flows through the Yamal-Europe pipeline to Germany were steady on Wednesday morning and above levels at the weekend, data from German network operator Gascade showed.

The pipeline, which runs through Belarus - crippled by the migrant crisis and a stand-off with the West - is one of the major existing routes for Russian gas exports to Europe.

Adding to concerns about possible interruptions of gas exports from Russia, Belarussian leader Alexander Lukashenko has warned that he may shut the pipeline in a dispute with the EU.

Flows via the Yamal-Europe pipeline into Germany at the Mallnow metering point on the Polish border were running at an hourly volume of over 12,500,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) on Wednesday, roughly the same as Tuesday, the data showed.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Hungary Covid deaths, cases hit new high
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-europe-hungary-european-union-abccb159313ed9bdfa7059c918b5a918
GIST	<p>BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Hungary's number of daily COVID-19 deaths and new officially recorded cases on Wednesday climbed to highs not seen since a devastating pandemic surge last spring.</p> <p>Government figures showed 178 daily deaths and 10,265 new cases in the country of fewer than 10 million. The latter figure approached record pandemic highs set in March, while daily deaths were the highest since May 1.</p> <p>The numbers reflected a worsening pandemic situation in the Central European country, which in spring had the highest COVID-19 death rate per capita in the world.</p> <p>An early leader in inoculations, Hungary has struggled to overcome vaccine hesitancy in recent months. Around 40% of its total population has still not received a jab. It lags nearly 9 percentage points behind the average vaccination rate in the rest of the 27-country European Union.</p> <p>State-run hospitals have set aside 20% of the country's beds for patients with severe cases of COVID-19, in accordance with a decree from Hungary's Ministry of Human Resources which went into effect on Monday.</p> <p>On Wednesday, 5,852 patients were being treated in hospitals for COVID-19.</p> <p>In October, the government allowed private employers to require that their employees get vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition for work, and required all public employees including teachers to receive a jab.</p> <p>On Monday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged Americans to avoid traveling to Hungary.</p>

HEADLINE	11/17 Europe only region rising Covid deaths
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-pandemics-united-nations-western-europe-a5a173278c63fed852a8179cadf37ac6
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — The World Health Organization says coronavirus deaths in Europe rose by 5% in the last week, making it the only region in the world where COVID-19 mortality increased. The U.N. health agency said confirmed cases jumped 6% jump globally, driven by increases in the Americas, Europe and Asia.</p> <p>In its weekly report on the pandemic issued late Tuesday, WHO said COVID-19 deaths in all regions other than Europe remained stable or declined, and totaled 50,000 worldwide last week. Of the 3.3 million new infections reported, 2.1 million came from Europe.</p> <p>It was the seventh consecutive week that COVID-19 cases continued to mount across the 61 countries WHO counts in its European region, which stretches through Russia to central Asia.</p> <p>While about 60% of people in Western Europe are fully immunized against COVID-19, only about half as many are vaccinated in the eastern part of the continent, where officials struggle to overcome widespread vaccine hesitancy.</p> <p>WHO said infections have been falling in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia since July.</p> <p>Within Europe, WHO said the highest numbers of new cases were in Russia, Germany and Britain. It noted that deaths jumped by 67% in Norway and by 38% in Slovakia.</p> <p>The health agency previously described Europe as being the epicenter of the ongoing pandemic and warned that there could be 500,000 more deaths by January if urgent actions aren't taken.</p> <p>In the last week, Austria, the Netherlands and some other countries reintroduced some lockdown measures to try to slow infections, while the U.K. decided to roll out booster doses to everyone over age 40.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 New Covid hotspots: Michigan, Minnesota
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-minnesota-michigan-0a59b4f4cd82aec3190cf23ada3abdf5
GIST	<p>Hospitals in Michigan and Minnesota on Tuesday reported a wave of COVID-19 patients not seen in months as beds were filled with unvaccinated people and health care leaders warned that staff were being worn down by yet another surge.</p> <p>Michigan had slightly more than 3,000 COVID-19 patients in hospitals this week, the first time it had crossed that threshold since spring, while nearly all hospital beds were occupied in Minnesota. Both held the unflattering rank of national virus hotspots.</p> <p>It “should be alarming to all of us,” Bob Riney, chief operating officer at Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, said of the hospital crush.</p> <p>The overall outlook has improved significantly in recent weeks in the U.S., with coronavirus hospitalizations standing at about 40,000, compared with more than 90,000 at the peak of the delta surge. Virus spread has slowed in the South to the point that more locations are doing away with mask restrictions.</p> <p>But pockets of the country are seeing surges, including the Northeast, Rockies and Upper Midwest.</p>

Henry Ford Health and Spectrum Health across the state in Grand Rapids, Michigan, together reported 700 COVID-19 patients in their hospitals, the majority of whom were not vaccinated. Positive test rates were running above 20%.

Michigan had the country's highest seven-day COVID-19 case rate at 503 per 100,000 people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Minnesota was No. 2 at 490.

"All of us had hoped that we'd be in a very different place as we approach this Thanksgiving season. But we really are not," Riney said.

When he listens to front-line staff, Riney said they are disheartened to see more COVID-19 cases, especially when vaccines are available.

"These are the women and men that the community celebrated last year," he said. "Parades were held in their honor. They were touted as the heroes they are. ... They haven't gotten a break."

In Minnesota, Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm said she's ready to expand access to the booster vaccine by the end of the week if the federal government doesn't act first.

"As we now head indoors for the winter and gather for the holidays, this booster protection is particularly important and timely," Malcolm said.

Meanwhile, a growing number of Americans are getting boosters. Arkansas this week joined California, Colorado and New Mexico in offering them to anyone 18 or older instead of only giving them to people at a greater risk for COVID-19 or age 65 and up.

Elsewhere, some communities in the South were easing virus restrictions as a result of high vaccination rates and low numbers of positive tests.

Louisiana State University dropped an indoor mask order on campus. More than eight out of every 10 students and 79% of staff are vaccinated against COVID-19.

"We are moving forward with confidence but with caution," President William Tate said.

Masks and social distancing now are optional in Florida courthouses. Chief Justice Charles Canady noted that nearly 70% of eligible Florida residents were fully vaccinated and the rate of new COVID-19 cases had dropped.

In Orange County, Florida, which includes Orlando, county employees are no longer required to wear masks indoors, although masks still are recommended. Local virus transmission risk was downgraded to moderate.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Calif. gas prices soar to record high
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/california-gas-prices-soar-record-130054189.html
GIST	<p>Brian Sproule squinted against the sun on Monday as he examined the price board at a Chevron station in downtown Los Angeles, where a regular gallon of gas was \$6.05.</p> <p>Sproule, 37, is a mobile notary who spends much of his time in his car. He said he's used to spending about \$40 to fill his tank, but by the time he capped off his Hyundai Elantra, the meter displayed a whopping \$71.59.</p> <p>"This is absurd," he said, shaking his head.</p>

Gas prices in California are soaring to record levels as the holiday season approaches, combining with [supply chain](#) problems that have left some goods in short supply and [mounting inflation](#) to create a distinctly unfestive strain on many people's wallets.

Statewide, the average price of a regular gallon reached an all-time high of \$4.682 on Monday, according to the American Automobile Assn. Experts are not sure how high pump prices will go, but it's going to further squeeze consumers who hope for a more normal holiday season of road trips to family gatherings and drives to shops to purchase presents.

"It's not just the gas, it's everything," said Monica Oliva, 36, as she filled her bright orange sedan at the station.

Oliva said she and her family had been planning to visit relatives in San Francisco for the holiday — part of an annual tradition to travel during the days off — but decided to cancel after one too many mounting costs made the whole endeavor seem impossible.

"We saw all the prices increasing — it's crazy," she said. "Even the carne asada at the market is \$25 to \$36, so we were like, 'OK we have to change our plans to make [Thanksgiving] affordable.'"

Monday's gas prices marked the state's second record-breaking day in a row. The price for regular unleaded was six-tenths of a cent higher than the Sunday average reported by the AAA, breaking the previous state record of \$4.671 set in October 2012.

Still, experts said most people are not highly reactive to fluctuating gas prices, and many are dead-set on making the most of this year's season. The Auto Club is projecting that about 3.8 million Southern Californians will drive to their holiday destinations this year — a 9% increase over [2020](#) and within striking distance of pre-pandemic levels.

If the numbers materialize along with air travel projections, it will mark Southern California's second-busiest Thanksgiving travel volume on record, and just 3% less than the all-time record of 4.5 million local Thanksgiving travelers set in 2019, according to the AAA.

"For the vast majority, people are still going to be taking road trips — especially this year — to reconnect with their loved ones," said AAA Southern California spokesman Doug Shupe. "People are so looking forward to getting out there and having that traditional Thanksgiving again with their friends and their family."

Shupe said the soaring gas prices are being driven primarily by higher crude oil costs and increased demand for fuel. A barrel of West Texas intermediate crude on the [New York Mercantile Exchange](#) closed at \$80.79 on Friday — more than double its 52-week low.

"We had really, [really low demand during the pandemic](#), and then it just ramped up rapidly as more and more people became vaccinated," he said. "The [desire to get out there and travel](#) really picked up quickly."

Prices also surged in several counties, including Los Angeles, where they climbed to \$4.672 Monday — nearing the record of \$4.705 set nine years ago.

That number is about 7.9 cents more than it was one week ago, 20.8 cents more than one month ago and \$1.52 more than one year ago, according to the AAA.

What's more, California's numbers have surpassed those of the nation, which hovered at an average of \$3.415 per gallon on Monday. The all-time average high nationwide, \$4.114, was set in July 2008.

UC Berkeley energy economist Severin Borenstein said oil prices dropped from about \$60 a barrel to \$30 when the pandemic started but have come back up as the world economy has rebounded. Some California-

specific environmental programs, including the [cap-and-trade program](#) and low-carbon fuel standards aimed at reducing greenhouse emissions, also add a "small kick" to the state's prices.

AAA spokesman Jeffrey Spring said the recent heavy rains were also partly to blame for California's surging prices after the state's oil refineries were "inundated with water," affecting production. The atmospheric river in October [broke several records](#) as it dumped a deluge across the state; Spring said it was not unlike the disruption experienced by some Louisiana refineries after [Hurricane Ida](#).

And though the [backlog at the ports](#) of Los Angeles and Long Beach is creating a massive headache for consumer goods that could bleed into Christmas, it's not having much of an effect on gas prices, said Borenstein, as oil and gas entering the state come through specialized ports.

Borenstein said the only real long-term solution is to effectively drive down the demand for oil. California has made some steps toward those reductions — including Gov. Gavin Newsom's [\\$15-billion climate package](#), which allocated \$3.9 billion for electric vehicle investment and infrastructure, among other items.

President Biden's historic [\\$1-trillion infrastructure bill](#), signed Monday, also includes allocations for public transportation and electric cars in California.

Those changes will take years to implement, Borenstein said, but there is reason to be optimistic.

"The best information is that oil prices are higher now than they will be a year or two from now — that they will gradually come down," he said.

That is little comfort to people trying to balance their checkbooks now.

"Everything's skyrocketing," said Damian Maculam, 29, who was gassing up a van downtown. Maculam said the van rental company he works for enables him to fill only \$50 at a time, which used to be enough but now provides substantially less than a full tank. Most vans are delivered to clients half-full.

Maculam said he'll be spending Thanksgiving with his father in Los Angeles but lamented that it will mark the second holiday in a row that he hasn't felt safe enough to fly home to Hawaii to finally meet his sister's baby, who was born in May of 2020.

Meanwhile, those hoping to wait it out until December might also be out of luck: Though crude prices could ease up a bit in the weeks to come, demand is probably going to stay strong for the next couple of months, said Shupe, of AAA Southern California.

"We really don't know when we're going to see them starting to lower," he said of gas prices. "It's possible we could see higher prices with us through the holiday season."

For some, lower prices can't come soon enough.

"I usually don't pay that much attention, but this is alarming," said Karim Howard, 27, as he filled up his Volkswagen Golf at a Shell station in Carthay Circle, where the price of a regular gallon was \$5.99 on Monday.

Howard opted to put \$10 — less than two gallons — into his car to get him through some errands, he said. He hoped it would be enough to get him to Costco at the end of the day, where he anticipated saving a few dollars when he filled up the rest of his tank.

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HEADLINE	11/16 WA police accountability board members
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/inslee-picks-advisory-board-for-new-statewide-police-accountability-office/

GIST

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee announced his picks Tuesday for an 11-member panel to oversee the state's newly created police accountability office with powers to independently investigate cases of law enforcement's use of deadly force.

Among Inslee's choices to serve on the advisory board of the new Office of Independent Investigations (OII) are Monica Alexander, the newly appointed executive director of the Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission and retired captain and former spokesperson for the Washington State Patrol; and Monisha Harrell, LGBTQ activist, board chair of Equal Rights Washington and campaign manager and niece of Seattle Mayor-elect Bruce Harrell.

The OII advisory board is tasked with providing input and advice to the office's eventual director about its establishment and operations. The office's director has not yet been appointed. Inslee's office said Tuesday that a national search is underway to identify candidates for the role.

The aim of the office is to "provide communities, families, individuals, and law enforcement with reassurance that their cases are being examined and reviewed in an unbiased way," according to a statement from Inslee, posted on the governor's website.

Alexander, a member chosen to represent the policing profession, and Harrell, a member representing the general public, are joined by nine other members appointed to represent various stakeholders from across Washington, such as police, prosecutors, defense attorneys and citizens, including those with family members killed by police.

The other appointees to the board include Breean Breggs, a defense attorney and Spokane City Council president; Eric Drever, Tukwila police chief; Norma Gallegos, an immigration services coordinator from Leavenworth; Anthony Golik, Clark County prosecutor; and Philip Harju, a tribal attorney for the Cowlitz Indian Tribe.

Other selected members include Susie Kroll, a mental health expert from Monroe; Faapouaita Leapai, a general public member from Burien; James Schrimpscher, Algona police chief and vice president of the Washington Fraternal Order of Police; and Fred Thomas, whose unarmed son, Leonard Thomas, [was killed by a Lakewood police officer in 2013](#) while holding his son.

The statewide police accountability office stems from [a state House bill passed this year](#) as part of [a series of police reform bills](#) approved by the Legislature and signed by Inslee. Inslee also sought the office's establishment based on recommendations from [a task force he convened last year](#) in the aftermath of the deaths of two Black men at the hands of police: [Manuel Ellis, in Tacoma](#), and George Floyd, in Minneapolis.

When initially sponsoring the proposal for the office, state Rep. Debra Entenman, D-Kent, said "a lack of accountability for that violence has eroded the community trust in law enforcement."

[One officer](#) in Washington has been charged with murder since voters approved Initiative 940, the police accountability reform measure that made it easier to prosecute officers for deadly force. A recent [report](#) found that 5 out of 18 investigations into police use of deadly force met all the requirements for an independent investigation called for by the measure, which Washington voters approved in 2018.

"This new independent office will provide real accountability when police take a person's life with a focus on working with the families of those killed. Knowing that a thorough, unbiased investigation has taken place will help families and communities heal," Entenman said in a statement Tuesday.

The advisory board members' appointments are effective immediately.

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HEADLINE

11/16 DHS watchdog declines BP investigation

SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/dhs-watchdog-declined-to-investigate-border-patrol-horseback-conduct-with-haitian-migrants/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security’s inspector general has “declined to investigate” the conduct of horse-mounted border patrol officers in Del Rio, Texas, chasing Haitian migrants as they attempted to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, DHS said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The inspector general’s office has referred the case back to the DHS Office of Professional Responsibility, which “immediately commenced investigative work, including its review of videos and photographs and the interview of witnesses, employees, and CBP leadership,” the DHS statement said, referring to Customs and Border Protection.</p> <p>“DHS remains committed to conducting a thorough, independent, and objective investigation,” the agency said. “DHS will share information, as available, consistent with the need to protect the integrity of the investigation and individuals’ privacy.”</p> <p>Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas had promised a swift and impartial investigation after photographs and video footage of the Sept. 19 incident emerged, prompting a national uproar.</p> <p>White House officials, Democrats in Congress and immigration and civil rights advocacy groups had expressed concern over the images.</p> <p>“There will be consequences. It’s an embarrassment,” Biden said at the time. “It’s wrong. It sends the wrong message around the world. It sends the wrong message at home. It’s simply not who we are.”</p> <p>But some Republicans have defended the horse patrol tactics and have questioned the Biden administration’s decision to investigate the agents. They also criticized the president for his comments ahead of the results of the investigation.</p> <p>DHS said that the employees at the heart of the investigation will be given “due process” if disciplinary action is recommended.</p> <p>“The disciplinary process, which is separate from the fact-finding investigation, is subject to certain timelines established in CBP’s labor-management agreement with the employees’ union of the United States Border Patrol,” the statement said.</p> <p>“Once completed, the results of the investigation will be provided to CBP management to determine whether disciplinary action is appropriate and, if so, the specific discipline to be imposed,” the statement said.</p> <p>A DHS official confirmed to McClatchy that the Office of Professional Responsibility investigation is ongoing.</p> <p>The office may share its initial findings with the U.S. Attorney’s Office “to alert federal prosecutors of the facts of the case and ensure that administrative actions do not inadvertently compromise any potential criminal investigation,” the statement said.</p> <p>At the peak of the crisis, roughly 15,000 migrants, most of them Haitian, were camped at the site in Del Rio, according to DHS. The camp was cleared on Sept. 24, but DHS officials say the agency is preparing for additional Haitian migrant arrivals.</p> <p>Shortly after the images emerged, Mayorkas said he had directed an inquiry, placed the officers on administrative duties and alerted the agency’s inspector general.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Police monitor concerns on SPD budget
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SOURCE	https://publicola.com/2021/11/16/police-monitor-raises-concerns-about-spd-budget-crosscuts-new-editor-kills-opinion-section/
GIST	<p>During the Seattle City Council’s Monday morning briefing, budget chair Teresa Mosqueda responded to a Seattle Times editorial published last week charging that the council’s proposals for the Seattle Police Department’s 2022 budget could plunge the city into another confrontation with the federal district court.</p> <p>The editorial, which called on mayor-elect Bruce Harrell to hold a “public safety summit” soon after he takes office in January, challenged Mosqueda’s claim that the council’s amended SPD budget had been vetted by the court-appointed monitor who acts as the eyes and ears for Judge James Robart—the federal judge responsible for overseeing reforms to SPD as part of a decade-old arrangement called the “consent decree.” The Times’ source: An email to the editorial board from the monitor himself, Dr. Antonio Oftelie, who said that no one on the council had spoken to him directly about their plans for SPD’s 2022 budget.</p> <p>“I understand that it must continue to be an inconvenience to the Seattle Times editorial board to acknowledge that we did indeed continue to engage with the court monitor directly, as we have done in the past,” Mosqueda said, adding that Greg Doss, the council staffer who specializes in SPD’s budget, “reached out and directly engaged” with Oftelie on behalf of the council. “The court monitor is very aware that Greg [Doss] works on behalf of all council members,” Mosqueda said.</p> <p>During his meeting with Doss and a representative from the City Attorney’s Office, Oftelie did not offer direct feedback on the council’s budget proposals. A week later, he sent a memo to Mosqueda, along with public safety chair Lisa Herbold and council president Lorena González, raising concerns about the council’s plans to scale back SPD’s budget data analysis. Specifically, Oftelie described two programs—one that would identify 911 call types that could go to non-police emergency responders, and another that could identify officers with a pattern of using force during crisis calls—as vital to the department’s progress. If the council went through with plans to cut SPD’s data analysis budget, he added, the federal court might intervene. Despite his warning, Oftelie emphasized that “it is not the monitor’s role or intent to dictate City budget decisions.”</p> <p>Mosqueda’s office debuted the council’s changes to Durkan’s budget proposal a day after receiving Oftelie’s memo; during the quick turnaround, Mosqueda said that she worked with the council’s central staff to ensure that the proposed budgets for the two data analysis projects Oftelie flagged would remain untouched. The council’s proposed budget now only omits funding for two of SPD’s proposed technology programs, totaling around \$1.3 million.</p> <p>During the council’s budget discussions last week, Mosqueda called the first—a body-worn video analysis software used to assess racial disparities in policing—a “nice-to-have” item that the council could support in the future. The second technology is a wearable biometric monitor that would track police officers’ vital statistics to flag officers at risk of using excessive force or acting erratically because of stress.</p> <p>After Mosqueda’s rebuttal on Monday, Oftelie reiterated his frustration with the council’s communication style. His meeting with Doss, he told PubliCola, “was a one-hour briefing and in no way was meant or implied to be any type of ‘approval’ of the budget.” And after he raised his concerns about the council’s budget proposal in his memo, he added, “no one from City Council acknowledged receiving the memorandum or connected with me to discuss it before their Tuesday meeting.”</p> <p>In the past year, the consent decree has loomed large over Seattle’s budget discussions; in June, the council abandoned plans to cut \$2.83 million from SPD’s 2021 budget under pressure from the federal court. Oftelie, who advises the court about Seattle’s progress on police reforms, has argued that SPD needs to be able to rebuild its ranks after two years of record-breaking attrition in order to comply with the consent decree.</p>

	<p>Meanwhile, the council could soon run into problems with the federal court on another front: an ordinance that the council passed in August restricting SPD's ability to use so-called "less-lethal" weapons like tear gas for crowd control. Two weeks ago, Diaz reached out to Oftelie for legal guidance as his department prepares to update its policies to comply with the new law. In his letter to Oftelie, Diaz wrote that the ordinance may be at odds with the consent decree, setting the stage for another potential fight over the council's power to pass police reform laws while SPD is under federal oversight.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Covid breakthrough infections increasing
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/16/breakthrough-infections-complicate-covid-19-respon/
GIST	<p>COVID-19 breakthrough infections are increasing as vaccine effectiveness rates drop below 50% and the winter virus season fast approaches, threatening the vulnerable and promising more workforce disruption amid a nationwide labor shortage.</p> <p>The surge is forcing President Biden and governors to fight the pandemic on two fronts ahead of the holidays, trying to persuade skeptics to get vaccinated while using booster shots to backfill immunity in those who came forward early in the rollout but now have waning antibodies.</p> <p>"Don't overanalyze this, let's get as many folks boosted before the holidays as we can," New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, said Monday.</p> <p>The federal government tracks only the most severe breakthrough infections and gets a snapshot of what's going on nationwide. Some states do a more comprehensive job tracking breakthroughs.</p> <p>Massachusetts reported 4,608 cases in vaccinated people in the most recent reporting week, up 44% from the prior week as the New England cold sets in.</p> <p>In Minnesota, 5 in 100,000 vaccinated people were hospitalized for COVID-19 at the start of October versus 0.4 per 100,000 around Independence Day. Vaccinated people accounted for roughly 40% of the 483 COVID-19 deaths in the state from early September to early October.</p> <p>About 1 in 5 people hospitalized in Colorado is fully vaccinated, indicating that unvaccinated people occupy the lion's share of beds and fueling Gov. Jared Polis' pleas for people to shore up their protection with an extra shot.</p> <p>Multiple factors are behind the trend, including "the greater infectivity of [the delta variant], some decrease in immunity over time from vaccination and the generally high levels of COVID-19 circulating in the community — principally among the unvaccinated," said Dr. Daniel Kuritzkes, chief of the division of infectious diseases at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.</p> <p>The messenger-RNA vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna were rolled out in December and a one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine joined them in late February.</p> <p>They have generally held up against hospitalization and death, but the fast-moving delta variant of the virus struck in late summer, severely challenging the vaccines' power as antibodies waned over time.</p> <p>A massive study involving 780,000 U.S. veterans published this month in the journal Science found protection against any infection at all plummeted from 87.9% in February to 48.1% by October.</p> <p>Pfizer's protection dropped from 86.9% to 43.3%, and Moderna's from 89.2% to 58%. Protection against infection from the J&J vaccine plummeted from 86.4% in March to 13% in September, according to researchers from the Public Health Institute, the Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the University of Texas Health Science Center.</p>

The J&J shot was 73% effective against death for those under age 65, while the Pfizer and Moderna shots were 84.3% and 81.5% effective, respectively.

The vaccines' ability to stave off some degree of infection had been a key selling point for the Biden administration, which is pushing mandates on federal workers, contractors and health care workers. The administration also is waging a court battle over its push to require the shots or regular testing at large companies.

"Obviously, no vaccine is 100% protective against infection, but you do go a long way," Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said last week in describing the scientific goals of the mandates.

Business groups say the mandates, coupled with mounting breakthrough cases and other infections, will be a disruptive force in a nation facing big worker shortages.

"We particularly are concerned about the impact on absenteeism, and we're already facing a huge workforce crunch," said Ed Egee, vice president of government relations and workforce development at the National Retail Federation.

Mr. Egee estimated the retail sector needs to fill nearly 700,000 jobs as multiple sectors scramble for workers.

"We don't want to see the [virus] numbers going back up for any reason, particularly as we head into the holiday season," he said.

Fears about breakthrough infections burst into view following the July 4 holiday with a study of Cape Cod revelers reporting that three-quarters of the 469 people infected were fully vaccinated and seemed to have enough virus in their noses to transmit it, too.

Who's tracking breakthroughs

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tracks some but not all breakthrough infections, making it difficult to parse in real-time what share of infection in the U.S. is in the vaccinated, though local data consistently show unvaccinated people are at higher risk.

King County in Washington, which includes Seattle, tracks relative risk and found unvaccinated people were 3 times more likely to be infected, 12 times more likely to be hospitalized and 13 times more likely to die from COVID-19.

Colorado data show vaccinated people are 3.8 times less likely to get COVID, 9.7 times less likely to land in the hospital from the disease and 12.4 times less likely to die from it. The state was seeing about 146 cases per 100,000 people in vaccinated people and 560 cases per 100,000 in the unvaccinated as of the week of Oct. 24.

Fully vaccinated Minnesotans made up 197 of the 483 deaths from Sept. 5 to Oct. 9. That's a minority, though an increase from the 29% share in the previous four months, according to the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, which crunched the numbers after a recent data release from state officials.

Scientists caution that the percentage of infections, hospitalizations and deaths labeled as breakthroughs will rise relative to the percentage occurring among the unvaccinated simply because a broader swath of the population is getting immunized. If every single person were vaccinated, the raw numbers of infections, hospitalizations and deaths would go down, but they would all be labeled as breakthrough events.

The trend is forcing the White House into an odd posture, promoting initial vaccination as the most important part of the pandemic fight while lobbying for boosters to tamp down bad outcomes in the vulnerable and decrease the overall level of infection.

“As highlighted by the discussions of both the FDA and CDC advisory committees, I think many medical experts feel that boosting in the most vulnerable populations makes sense, but the case has not been made for widespread boosting of all,” Dr. Kuritzkes said. “I also think that most of us believe that vaccinating the 20-30% of the U.S. population that remains unvaccinated is far more important than widespread boosting of the already vaccinated.”

Inflection point

The booster debate comes at a critical juncture for the nation’s health and economy. Coronavirus cases are starting to pick up again around the country, generally hovering around 80,000 per day, and the steady drop in hospitalizations has flat-lined. The delta wave that smacked the South in late summer is moving into other parts of the country, including the Mountain West and parts of the Upper Midwest and New England.

Experts don’t expect this winter to be as disastrous as last year when the vaccine rollout was in its infancy. But Mr. Biden and his team are nervous about a mix of studies that, while dizzying at times, forge a clear verdict: The vaccines are losing their efficacy.

National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins last week said Israel, which got an early jump on vaccinations, got a snapshot of the Pfizer vaccine’s weakening defenses back in July.

“Among individuals 60 years or older who were fully vaccinated last January, the number of confirmed breakthrough infections was 3.3 per 1,000 people during the three weeks of the study,” Dr. Collins wrote in a blog post. “Those who were vaccinated in February and March had lower infection rates of 2.2 per 1,000 and 1.7 per 1,000, respectively.”

National data from the CDC on the delta wave in late summer show 113 per 100,000 vaccinated persons caught COVID-19 in early September compared to 12 per 100,000 around Independence Day.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices received a September presentation from the CDC that showed the Pfizer shots’ efficacy against symptomatic infection waned from about 95% to about 65% and the Moderna shots dwindled from about 95% to 70%. The J&J version hovered near 60% amid the delta wave, though far fewer people received the one-shot vaccine, and a second dose of the J&J vaccine could bump protection up to over 90%.

The Food and Drug Administration ultimately greenlighted boosters for all J&J recipients and subgroups of Pfizer and Moderna recipients, but it could bless boosters-for-all by Thanksgiving amid mounting calls to shore up defenses against the virus.

The two-dose vaccine from Pfizer was the first to be cleared for emergency use at the end of 2020. Now, the drugmaker wants to offer third doses to all adults based on new trial data from 10,000 participants in the U.S., Brazil and South Africa with a median age of 53 and who completed a two-dose series with the Pfizer vaccine.

During the study, there were five cases of COVID-19 in the booster group and 109 cases in the nonbooster group, for a relative efficacy of 95%.

“Infections are starting to rise. Hospitalizations are inching up. The holidays are approaching,” tweeted Ashish K. Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health. “The data is becoming increasingly clear. It is time for every adult 6 months out to get a booster.”

State officials are getting antsy. They're unhappy with the patchwork of federal rules and wish things were streamlined.

"Nearly 4 million New Jersey residents are eligible for boosters right now. However, only 24% of those who are eligible have actually received a booster," New Jersey Health Commissioner Judith M. Persichilli said. "Those who haven't received a booster yet may not understand that their immunity has weakened since they received their primary vaccine series."

Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico and California aren't waiting. They told their residents to get a booster if they want one, defying the federal process that hasn't opened the floodgates yet.

"Everybody should get the booster after six months," Mr. Polis, a Democrat, told Coloradans on CBS' "Face the Nation" over the weekend. "The data is incredibly clear that it increases your personal protection level. That's why my parents got it. I got it. My family members got it."

'Bored instead of sick'

While regulators debate boosters-for-all, some doctors say the public should get used to the virus as something that will ping around in the background, akin to nasty colds and the seasonal flu, and will reach the vaccinated at some point.

"I think we really need to emphasize the point of what the vaccine's intention was keeping [people] out of the hospital and safe," said Dr. Panagis Galiatsatos, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore who noted a dramatic decrease in ICU admissions for COVID-19. "Like a bulletproof vest doesn't stop bullets from injuring you, just from killing you — the same with the vaccine."

COVID-19 wasn't a prime suspect when Caren Gordon Cohen felt a tickle in her throat on her first trip back to the District of Columbia after having moved to Colorado in the early months of the pandemic.

She had been careful during the coronavirus crisis, wearing a mask and getting fully vaccinated with the Pfizer-BioNTech shots in April before the mid-September jaunt to her old stomping grounds.

"I thought, 'Ah, D.C. allergies,'" she said, recalling a Sunday night following a "super social" weekend that involved 11 friends and some outdoor dining after landing in the nation's capital that Friday.

A runny nose the next morning prompted her to get the first of a series of tests confirming she was positive for the virus, upending her trip and confining her to a Georgetown hotel.

Her friends didn't fall ill, but Ms. Cohen felt pretty bad for four days — a 102.5-degree fever, symptoms akin to the flu. She considered herself "lucky to be bored instead of sick" for the rest of her 10-day isolation.

"I watched a lot of bad TV," said Ms. Cohen, 53, who coaches and advises business executives. "I think I watched 'The Devil Wears Prada' three different times. Not proud of that, but I think it did happen."

Ms. Cohen, like many Americans, got her vaccine but still caught the virus.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki joined those ranks on Halloween, keeping her off the podium for 10 days. And Texas A&M University President M. Katherine Banks "is extremely disappointed to miss the many university activities scheduled for the next 10 days" after testing positive Friday, according to Greg Hartman, the university's vice president and chief operating officer.

For her part, Ms. Cohen said she knows people back home who caught the virus pre-vaccine and "it sounded considerably worse than what I had."

	<p>“I do think the vaccine gave us all so much comfort,” the business coach said. “I felt like I had been careful. I was vaccinated, I’m in good health, I just really didn’t think it was going to happen to me.”</p> <p>However, she said, “I feel very fortunate. I didn’t panic about the severity of the illness and fortunately, I was not that sick for very long.”</p> <p>Ms. Cohen plans to get a booster shot, but her doctors advised her to wait until at least January to give her immune system a respite. There is mounting evidence that people who survive a natural infection, combined with vaccination, have very good protection against the virus.</p> <p>“I hope so,” Ms. Cohen said. “I feel like I paid for it.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Pacific Northwest deadly floods, landslides
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/16/canada-fatalities-storm-pacific-north-west-washington
GIST	<p>At least one person has been killed and several more are feared dead after a huge storm hit the Pacific north-west, destroying highways and leaving tens of thousands of people in Canada and the US without power.</p> <p>Canada’s largest port was cut off by flood waters, as emergency crews in British Columbia announced on Tuesday that at least 10 vehicles had been swept off a highway during a landslide.</p> <p>“We’re hopeful to find people alive. But obviously that diminishes with time, the nature of the slide activity. People being caught up in mud and debris, it certainly diminishes as time goes by,” David MacKenzie, the Pemberton district search and rescue manager, told the Globe and Mail.</p> <p>The Royal Canadian Mounted Police confirmed a woman’s body was recovered from the site of the landslide during a search the previous night.</p> <p>“The total number of people and vehicles unaccounted for has not been confirmed, however investigators have received two missing people reports and believe there may have been other occupied vehicles that were lost in the slide,” said sergeant Janelle Shoihet of the BC RCMP.</p> <p>Search crews, working alongside the military, planned to use heavy equipment and dog teams to continue their search for survivors after poor weather hampered efforts. On Monday rescue helicopters airlifted 275 people, including 50 children, from a section of highway blocked by landslides.</p> <p>Although the high winds and the rains caused by an atmospheric river – a huge plume of moisture extending over the Pacific – began easing in the region, most of British Columbia remained under either flood watch or flood warning.</p> <p>South of the border, tens of thousands of households and businesses remain without power in Washington state. Nearly 50,000 Washington state electrical customers still had no power Tuesday after days of heavy rain triggered mudslides and floods and forced the closure of the west coast’s main north-south highway near the Canadian border, officials said.</p> <p>Authorities said one person was still missing Tuesday near Bellingham after being seen in flood waters clinging to a tree.</p> <p>The Washington governor Jay Inslee declared a severe weather state of emergency in 14 counties and said the state emergency management division, with support from the Washington national guard, would coordinate the response.</p>

Earlier in the day, the port of Vancouver, the largest in Canada, announced that all rail access had been cut by floods and landslides further to the east, a development that could hit shipments of grain, coal and potash. The TransMountain pipeline, which carries 300,000 barrels of oil a day, was also shut down.

A volunteer uses a boat to rescue people, including a toddler, who were stranded in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

With all of its surrounding highways closed off due to damage, including a section of the Coquihalla highway that officials warn could take months to repair, the city of Vancouver is cut off from the rest of Canada by road.

Aerial footage of the Fraser Valley, south-east of Vancouver, showed swaths of the land, including highways, underwater.

“This is an uncertain and scary time for people who are affected. They don’t understand what’s happening and what the future will be,” the Abbotsford mayor Henry Braun told reporters on Tuesday after parts of the city were placed under evacuation order.

As the scope of the damage became more clear, provincial officials faced questions over whether they adequately prepared residents for the heavy deluge of rain, which broke numerous records. Many of the alerts issued to drivers are highly localized, meaning travellers between two cities might not be aware of regional risks like flooding.

BC’s public safety minister Mike Farnworth defended his government’s handling of the situation, telling reporters the province warned residents that driving conditions would be dangerous.

“Those warnings and travel advisories are out. You know there was a lot of warnings that you know there’s a lot of rain coming and you know what most people stay home,” he said. “Most people stayed home and the reality is that communities are prepared.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Federal govt. unable to pay bills soon?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/federal-government-could-be-unable-to-pay-bills-as-soon-as-dec-15-yellen-says-11637103882?mod=hp_listb_pos2
GIST	<p>The U.S. government could run out of resources to meet the nation’s obligations as soon as Dec. 15, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday, reviving questions about how Congress will resolve a standoff about raising or suspending the federal borrowing limit.</p> <p>Ms. Yellen provided the new estimate of when the federal government might no longer be able to pay all of its bills in a letter to Congressional leaders. She had previously said that a debt-limit increase passed by Congress in October provided confidence that the federal government would be able to pay its bills at least through Dec. 3.</p> <p>“To ensure the full faith and credit of the United States, it is critical that Congress raise or suspend the debt limit as soon as possible,” she wrote.</p> <p>A transfer tied to President Biden’s signing Monday of a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill could leave the Treasury short on cash. The law instructs the Treasury to move \$118 billion to the Highway Trust Fund, which Ms. Yellen said would happen Dec. 15.</p> <p>“While I have a high degree of confidence that Treasury will be able to finance the U.S. government through December 15 and complete the Highway Trust Fund investment, there are scenarios in which Treasury would be left with insufficient remaining resources to continue to finance the operations of the U.S. government beyond this date,” she wrote.</p>

The letter doesn't indicate that Dec. 15 is the definite date when the U.S. may need to forgo certain obligations. Private analysts have said that date could fall between mid-December and mid-February.

The Treasury Department has been using what it calls extraordinary measures, such as suspending certain investments, to conserve cash as it bumps against [the \\$28.88 trillion borrowing limit](#) set by Congress. Raising the debt limit doesn't authorize new spending, but instead allows the government to issue new debt to pay for existing obligations, such as Social Security benefits and interest on the debt.

If the debt ceiling isn't addressed and the Treasury's available funds dwindle, the department could be forced to suspend certain payments or place a higher priority on the timing of some over others. Such a move could affect families, older Americans and others who rely on regular payments from the federal government, administration officials have warned.

Wall Street firms, economists and administration officials have also warned that if the Treasury were forced to delay interest payments on the debt, which would constitute default, it would roil financial markets and possibly trigger a recession.

Even just approaching the so-called X-date, or the date when the government will no longer be able to honor all its obligations fully, can have serious consequences, analysts have said. In 2011, Standard & Poor's [stripped the U.S. of its triple-A credit rating](#) for the first time after the Treasury came within days of being unable to pay certain benefits.

The path to addressing the debt limit in Congress is poised to be a reprise of the partisan fight waged earlier this year. Lawmakers in October were able to pass a measure lifting the debt ceiling by \$480 billion after Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) offered to raise the limit on a short-term basis, gathering 11 GOP votes to join Democrats and break a filibuster of the bill. Some Republicans, including Sen. John Cornyn (R., Texas.), said that the GOP wouldn't again provide votes to resolve the issue. "I think it was a one time event," he said.

Mr. McConnell on Tuesday didn't say whether Republicans would again seek to force Democrats to use a legislative process called reconciliation to raise the debt ceiling without GOP cooperation.

"We'll figure out how to avoid default, we always do," Mr. McConnell said.

Democrats refused to use reconciliation to raise the debt limit in October because they said both parties had historically cooperated in addressing the issue and warned that the process was time-consuming and could risk default. Democrats again said that Republicans should support efforts to raise the debt limit, but some didn't rule out using reconciliation to address the issue this time around.

Republicans "should join Democrats and remove an unnecessary cloud from over our economy," said Michael Gwin, a White House spokesman. "We did that in October and three times under the previous President, and there's no reason why we shouldn't do it again now."

The date when the government will no longer be able to fully pay all its bills is difficult to predict because some of the federal government's expenditures and receipts can vary widely from day to day, said Shai Akabas, director of economic policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a think tank. Mr. Akabas said that variance had been heightened during the Covid-19 pandemic because of government spending on new aid programs.

The Bipartisan Policy Center in late October said the date would likely fall between mid-December and mid-February. Other analysts have said the date could arrive as soon as late December or early January.

"We are just trying to give people a sense of when the X-date arrives and when things could go south in a hurry," Mr. Akabas said. "The fact that our window extends into February does not mean that Congress should wait to act until February."

HEADLINE	11/16 Flood warnings remain North Sound
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3239826/flood-warnings-continue-tuesday-damage-across-western-washington/
GIST	<p>Water is beginning to recede around swollen rivers, but people in valleys across Whatcom, Skagit, and Snohomish counties are still wading through muck.</p> <p>Officials estimate that roughly 500 people have been displaced over flooding in Whatcom County, 280 of whom are currently spread across three new shelters stood up on Tuesday. Moving forward, it could be days before many residents will be able to even get to their properties to assess damage.</p> <p>The National Weather Service reports that a flood warning has been extended through Thursday for the Skagit River near Mount Vernon and near Concrete affecting Skagit County. The NWS says dams on the river were able to absorb a large amount of the flood, but reservoirs are near maximum pool levels. As that water is released, recession of river levels downstream will slow.</p> <p>A flood warning is also in effect through Wednesday night for the Nooksack River at Ferndale and North Cedarville affecting Whatcom County. The NWS says deep and fast water will inundate residential area, farm lands, and roads especially on the Lummi Peninsula and in Sumas.</p> <p>Forecasters are also keeping close watch on the Snohomish River through Snohomish and Monroe, and the Samish River in Burlington.</p> <p>Heavy rain also increased the chances for dangerous landslides. Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management says tilted trees, cracks in the ground, and sunken roads are all signs of a potential slide.</p> <p>Classes are already canceled on Wednesday for the Mount Vernon School District and Burlington-Edison Public Schools. Several districts in the area were closed on Tuesday.</p> <p>Residents in both Mount Vernon and Ferndale were ordered on Tuesday to evacuate as levees and dikes were suspected of breaking or breaching. People in Mount Vernon were allowed to return home once it was deemed safe.</p> <p>Areas of Ferndale are still under evacuation notice for fear of the Nooksack River breaching a levee.</p> <p>In Mount Vernon, the mayor declared a civil emergency. The city of Mount Vernon and the American Red Cross have teamed up to offer shelter at Bethany Covenant Church on South 18th Street. It's open for anyone needing a safe place to stay during the flood.</p> <p>Bellingham, Ferndale, and Sumas were also hit hard Monday with devastating flooding and landslides, including parts of I-5 that have been shut down. I-5 in both directions through Ferndale (Main St) is open, according to the state patrol. Further south on I-5 northbound just north of Nulle Rd in Bellingham (MP 245), a mudslide is blocking all lanes with no estimate on when they'll reopen.</p> <p>Flooding in northeast Whatcom County displaced some 500 people, primarily in the communities of Everson and Sumas. The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office says three emergency shelters were opened to take care of those who have been flooded out of their homes.</p> <p>Sumas Mayor Kyle Christensen told KIRO Radio that roughly 75% of the town's homes suffered water damage from flooding, with many areas almost completely underwater.</p> <p>For drivers, now is not a good time to drive across Skagit or Whatcom counties if you don't need to do so. Washington State Patrol troopers say that dispatchers in the area are getting a large amount of 911 calls asking about the status of closed roads and detours.</p>

	<p>Tens of thousands of people are still in the dark after powerful wind gusts from Monday's storm. A majority of the outages — about 6,000 customers — are in Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. At least 20,000 Puget Sound Energy customers are without power as of Tuesday evening.</p> <p>On Monday evening, Governor Jay Inslee declared a severe weather state of emergency for every county in Northwest Washington, which was effective immediately. The order directs that the plans and procedures to the Washington State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan be implemented.</p> <p>Under the order, state agencies and departments are directed to use state resources and “to do everything reasonably possible to assist affected political subdivisions in an effort to respond to and recover from the event.” The Washington State Military Department, Emergency Management Division, and the Washington National Guard will also coordinate incident-related assistance.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 'No plans currently' to lift mask mandate
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3240494/gov-inslee-no-plans-currently-to-lift-washingtons-mask-mandate/
GIST	<p>Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser announced Tuesday that she would be lifting the city's indoor mask mandate, effective Nov. 22. In Washington state, though, COVID case rates remain at concerning levels, with no plans to lift the state's own mandate in the immediate future.</p> <p>Bowser noted in her announcement that lifting the city's mandate “does not mean everyone needs to stop wearing their mask, but it does mean that we're shifting the government's response to providing you this risk-based information, and recommending layering strategies as the best way to protect yourself and the community.”</p> <p>As of mid-November, the seven-day average of new reported daily COVID cases in D.C. sat around 82, with 70% of its population ages 12 and up having been fully vaccinated.</p> <p>Comparatively, Washington state's seven-day case rate remains at roughly 158 (per 100,000 population). That's well below the 300-plus daily cases the state was seeing at the peak of its fall surge, but still more than the 137 daily cases seen during spring's surge. Over 71% of Washington's population ages 12 and up have been fully vaccinated.</p> <p>Given that, state officials remain hesitant to lift Washington's rules regarding facial coverings.</p> <p>“There are no plans currently to lift the mask mandate,” a spokesperson for Gov. Jay Inslee's office told MyNorthwest. “We're encouraged that COVID activity continues to decline over time but the numbers remain high.”</p> <p>The state will continue to monitor COVID activity in the weeks and months ahead, with Inslee's office stating that the governor plans to adhere to CDC guidance in the meantime.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Plan: stockpile \$5B Covid antiviral pills
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/16/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates#biden-pfizer-covid-pill-purchase
GIST	<p>The Biden administration is planning to pay more than \$5 billion for a stockpile of Pfizer's new Covid-19 pill, enough for about 10 million courses of treatment, after the company gears up production next year, according to people familiar with the agreement.</p> <p>Senior federal health officials describe the pill as a powerful new weapon against Covid. When given promptly to trial groups of high-risk unvaccinated people who developed symptoms of the disease, the drug sharply reduced the risk of hospitalization and death.</p>

The action comes at a time of renewed hope among some senior Biden administration officials that the nation may have weathered the worst of the pandemic, even as the onset of winter threatens to spur the spread of infection.

More than 70 percent of the nation's adults are now fully vaccinated. After exacting a horrific toll since midsummer, the virus has left a trail of death and disease but also more natural immunity in its wake, some public health experts say.

"I do think that these new oral antivirals will change the way that Covid is managed," said Dr. David Dowdy, an associate professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "These will help reduce burden on hospitals and the death toll."

"But even without these pills, those numbers are going down," he added.

Pfizer on Tuesday [asked the Food and Drug Administration](#) to authorize its pill for high-risk, unvaccinated people. A similar drug developed by Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics could be authorized as soon as early December.

A spokesman for Pfizer, Kit Longley, said that while the company is seeking authorization for its pill to be given only to unvaccinated people for now, it might ask for a modification later, depending on the data from clinical trials.

Both treatments are geared toward people who are older than 65 or who suffer from medical conditions that put them at higher risk of severe Covid. Among clinical trial volunteers, the Pfizer drug cut the risk of hospitalization or death by 89 percent when given within three days after the start of symptoms.

The Merck pill was about 50 percent effective when given within five days of the onset of symptoms, though the different designs and timing of the trials make comparisons imprecise.

Pfizer has said it expects to be able to produce enough pills for more than 180,000 people by the end of this year and for more than 21 million in the first half of next year. Merck, too, has said it plans to ramp up production over the next year.

The U.S. government had initially planned to order 1.7 million courses of Pfizer's treatment, with an additional option for 3.3 million, for about \$700 per course.

But the new supply of ten million courses is expected to cost significantly less per treatment. The treatment involves 30 pills taken over the course of five days.

The contract is still being finalized, but an announcement is expected this week, according to one official familiar with the deal.

The government [has also ordered](#) 3.1 million treatment courses, with options for 2 million more, of Merck's pill, at about \$700 per person.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Cold, marooned in Belarus: desperation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/world/europe/poland-belarus-border-crisis.html
GIST	<p>BRUZGI, Belarus — He has spent 28 nights, each colder than the one before, choking on campfire smoke and despair on Europe's doorstep. He made it across the razor wire into Poland three times, only to be grabbed in the forest and forced back into Belarus. His visa for Belarus expired 12 days ago, leaving him at the mercy of a repressive police state.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Rawand Akram, a 23-year-old Kurd from Iraq, snapped.</p>

He and hundreds of other desperate and increasingly angry migrants, marooned at the border — and egged on, he said, by Belarusian security officials — stampeded toward a frontier checkpoint, hurling stones and debris at Polish security forces massed just a few yards away. What began around noon as just another attempt to breach the border fence spiraled into a dangerous melee, and Polish officers responded with volleys from water cannons and blasts of tear gas.

“I am angry. Everyone is angry. This is the last thing we could do. There is no other solution if we ever want to get to Europe,” Mr. Akram said.

Hours later, Belarus border guards suddenly began moving hundreds of migrants from their frozen encampment to the shelter of a nearby warehouse. It was not immediately clear what plans the authorities had for those they were moving, but many feared that the relocation was a prelude to deportation, not just a humane gesture.

Tuesday’s clash, the worst in a monthslong impasse on the European Union’s eastern flank, underscored the perils of a standoff between Belarus, a close ally of Russia, and Poland, a member of NATO and the European Union, each determined not to bend. At least 11 people have died at the border in recent weeks.

“We are just a stick that they are beating each other with,” said Mr. Akram. “We are in the middle of their fight.”

He said Belarusian security officers had instigated the melee by telling migrants stranded in a fetid, frozen encampment just yards from Poland that Warsaw’s hard-line nationalist government would never let them enter unless forced to do so.

But he also blamed Poland for putting its determination to resist pressure from Belarus’ authoritarian leader, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, ahead of the lives of desperate people.

“Nobody wants to look weak,” he said. “We have become a ball kicked about in their big political game.”

E.U. officials have called the crisis a “hybrid war” engineered by Mr. Lukashenko to punish Poland for sheltering some of his most outspoken opponents and pressure the bloc into lifting sanctions on his country. Belarus insists, for its part, that it is a humanitarian catastrophe created by Europe’s refusal to abide by international law and give people fleeing war and despair the right to at least apply for asylum.

To give some credence to its own version of events, Belarus has allowed a few foreign news organizations, including The New York Times, to visit the border and witness the squalor and desperation. Poland, eager to keep despair out of the public eye, has sealed off its own side of the border, barring aid workers, journalists and even doctors from getting within miles of the scene of Tuesday’s troubles.

Instead, Warsaw has left it to government officials to describe events and blame Belarus for all the suffering. “The entire aggressive behavior is coordinated by Belarusian services and monitored by drones,” the Polish authorities said, posting videos of the confrontations. They said a police officer was seriously injured and was being treated at a hospital for what was believed to be a skull fracture.

A migrant on the Belarusian side lost consciousness, apparently after being hit by a blast from a Polish water cannon, four of which are lined up by a closed border checkpoint decorated with emblems of the European Union and Poland.

Poland’s tough stance — “we are not talking about a humanitarian crisis but a threat,” the head of the National Security Bureau said over the weekend — has won strong support from its allies. The European Union decided on Monday to expand sanctions imposed on Belarus earlier this year, after Mr. Lukashenko’s military forced down a passenger plane carrying a prominent dissident.

Warsaw's hard line has also played well at home, particularly among supporters of Poland's governing party, Law and Justice. The Polish national bank announced this week that it would issue new commemorative coins and notes to honor "the defense of the Polish eastern border."

But the Polish government has come under criticism from humanitarian organizations for a legal amendment it passed in October that allows migrants to be pushed back at the border and for asylum claims made by those who entered illegally to be ignored.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov of Russia on Tuesday called Polish forces' treatment of migrants "absolutely unacceptable." Mr. Lavrov said at a news conference that the forces "violate all conceivable norms of international humanitarian law and other agreements of the international community."

Belarusian authorities have silenced nearly all independent voices since a contested presidential election last year that was widely viewed as rigged. But they have become more open to scrutiny at the border than Poland, a democracy with a vibrant media, now blindfolded in the border zone.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's secretary general, said on Tuesday that the alliance was "deeply concerned about the way the Lukashenko regime is using vulnerable migrants as a hybrid tactic against other countries, and this is actually putting the life of the migrants at risk."

There are limits, however, to how far Mr. Lukashenko can ratchet up tensions and even some signs that he may be trying to dial them down. The flow of migrants is slowing as airlines either halt flights to Minsk, the Belarusian capital, or ban Iraqi and Syrian passengers.

In Minsk early Tuesday, scores of migrants were still staying at the Yubileiny Hotel, operated by the president's property department, but some said they had been forced to check out and feared expulsion.

The Lukashenko government has denied allegations, including from the United States, that it has engineered the crisis and is directing the movement of the migrants.

"We cannot let this so-called problem lead to heated confrontation," Mr. Lukashenko told a government meeting on Tuesday, according to Belta, the state news agency.

"The main thing now is to protect our country and our people, and not to allow clashes," he added. Belarus said it was investigating the actions of Polish border guards but avoided its previous belligerent talk of an imminent attack by NATO.

The Iraqi government is organizing an evacuation flight for later this week from Minsk back to Iraq.

"I would rather die here in the cold than go back to Iraq," said Rekar Hamid, a 32-year-old Iraqi Kurd who spent around \$10,000 to get himself, his wife and 2-year-old son to the edge of the E.U. and still hopes to make it the last few yards. He sleeps in a flimsy green tent beside the road to the border checkpoint. Behind it sprawls an apocalyptic vista of campfires and shivering people in filthy clothes.

Belarus's border guards estimate that there are at least 2,000 people stranded in the Bruzgi area.

The decision to shelter some migrants in a warehouse on Tuesday could signal that Belarus wants to ease border tensions. Some of those who walked to the warehouse — through a narrow corridor guarded by Belarusian soldiers with automatic weapons — seemed to be giving up.

Bilal, 23, a migrant from Iraq who would only provide his first name said: "It is too impossible to get to Europe, we want to go home."

Mr. Akram, too, said he had enough, despite having spent \$4,700 to get within yards of his goal. With temperatures at night dropping to below freezing, he said he could not face any more days waking up feeling like a mummy trapped in a sleeping bag stiff with ice. "It is finished, all finished," he said.

	But as night fell, hundreds of others could still be seen in the open near the border crossing, dragging wooden logs and straw as they prepared for another freezing night.
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HEADLINE	11/16 Mass detentions of civilians in Ethiopia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/17/world/africa/ethiopia-tigrayan-detention.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya — The family was startled awake by a loud bang in the middle of the night on the gate of their home on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.</p> <p>Police officers barged in without a warrant, ransacking the living room and looking under the beds. They seized three members of the family, among them a 76-year-old, one-legged amputee yanked from bed while his sons begged to go in his place.</p> <p>“They showed him no mercy even after he cried, ‘I am disabled and diabetic,’” said the man’s nephew, Kirubel, who would give only his first name for fear of reprisals.</p> <p>The family is among hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of Ethiopians belonging to the Tigrayan ethnic group who have been rounded up and detained in the capital and beyond in recent weeks.</p> <p>For the past year, Ethiopia’s prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has been waging a grisly war against Tigrayan rebels in the country’s northernmost region. Tigrayans had dominated the Ethiopian government and army for decades until Mr. Abiy took power in 2018 and sidelined their leaders. But since the war began, the Tigrayans have routed the Ethiopian army in Tigray, swept south, recently captured two strategic towns and threatened to advance toward the capital.</p> <p>On Nov. 2, the government declared a state of emergency, and the resulting roundups have swept up anyone of Tigrayan descent, many of whom had no ties to the rebels or even affinity for them. They were not just young men and women, but also mothers with children and the elderly, according to human rights advocates and interviews with nearly a dozen family members and friends of detainees.</p> <p>They have been seized off the streets, in their homes and even in workplaces — including banks, schools and shopping centers — and taken to overcrowded cells in police stations and detention facilities.</p> <p>Tigrayans have been targeted by the police based on a mix of hints: their surnames, details listed on identification cards and drivers licenses, even the way they speak Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia.</p> <p>The campaign of arrests, which has also been aimed at members of some other ethnic groups, has swept up people in cities across the country, according to information provided by the police, rights groups and opposition parties. At least 10 United Nations staff members and 34 subcontracted drivers also have been seized.</p> <p>“The state of emergency in force in Ethiopia risks compounding an already very serious human rights and humanitarian situation in the country,” the top U.N. human rights official, Michelle Bachelet, said Tuesday through a spokeswoman. “Its provisions are extremely broad, with vague prohibitions going as far as encompassing ‘indirect moral’ support for what the government has labeled ‘terrorist groups.’”</p> <p>The ethnically motivated detentions come amid a significant rise in online hate speech, which is only adding fuel to the civil war tearing apart Africa’s second-most populous nation. Reports of massacres, ethnic cleansing and widespread sexual assault by all sides in the conflict have undermined the vision of Ethiopian unity that Mr. Abiy, the prime minister and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, promised when he rose to power more than three years ago.</p>

The war between Ethiopian federal forces and their allies and Tigrayan rebel fighters has left thousands of people dead, at least 400,000 living in famine-like conditions and millions displaced. It risks engulfing the whole of Ethiopia and the wider Horn of Africa.

Mr. Abiy's determination to prosecute the war seems to have been only hardened by economic threats from the Biden administration, which has imposed sanctions on his military allies in neighboring Eritrea and suspended Ethiopia from duty-free access to the U.S. market.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, who is traveling to Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal this week, has expressed worry that Ethiopia could "implode."

As rebels pushed to within 200 miles of the capital early this month, Mr. Abiy promised to defend the capital "with our blood" even as African and Western envoys sought to broker a cease-fire.

Police officials have defended the arrests, saying they were seizing supporters of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the country's former dominant party, which Ethiopia now classifies as a terrorist organization.

Activists, however, say the state of emergency provisions are so nebulous that they give security officials unfettered latitude. The provisions allow for the search of any person's home or their arrest without a warrant "upon reasonable suspicion" that they cooperate with terrorist groups.

Laetitia Bader, the Horn of Africa director at Human Rights Watch, said "the state of emergency is legitimizing and legalizing unlawful practices" and creating "a real climate of fear."

Many ethnic Tigrayans say they now fear leaving home. Almost all those who agreed to be interviewed declined to be identified by name for fear that they might be arrested or face retaliation.

Some Tigrayans in and outside Addis Ababa said they were staying with non-Tigrayan friends to evade arrest. Others said they had stopped speaking the Tigrinya language in public spaces and have deleted any music or documents on their cellphones that could identify their ethnicity.

If a phone call to a relative does not go through, they fear the worst.

"I am even afraid to call," said one Tigrayan in Nairobi, having learned that five relatives and friends had been seized. "It is always bad news."

While the arrests have included other ethnicities and spread to other parts of the country, most have targeted Tigrayans.

In Addis Ababa, security officers have demanded that landlords identify Tigrayan tenants. In one secondary school, a teacher said four Tigrayan teachers had been taken into custody as they ate lunch after officers arrived with a letter from the intelligence service containing their names.

A merchant in Addis Ababa, 38, was picked up by security officers after he opened his mobile phone accessories shop. A nearby shop owner phoned that news to the seized merchant's wife, who said she left their two children with a neighbor and rushed to the shop — only to find it closed and her husband gone.

After a three-day search, the wife said, she found her husband in a crowded Addis Ababa detention facility with no proper bedding or food.

In Addis Ababa, rights groups say, police stations are so full of detainees that the authorities have moved the overflow to heavily guarded makeshift facilities, among them youth recreation centers, warehouses and one major prison. With no access to lawyers, some relatives of detainees say they will not approach these facilities, fearful they could be arrested too.

According to three accounts, many detainees are kept in packed concrete cells, with no bathrooms, no food and abusive sentries who call them terrorists. Some detainees use plastic bottles to urinate. Those lucky enough to receive food from family and friends share it.

Fisseha Tekle, the Amnesty International researcher for Ethiopia and Eritrea, called the conditions “appalling” and said they risked sending the country to “the brink of a human rights catastrophe.”

The roundups have intensified as activists warn of a rise in social media posts inciting violence against ethnic Tigrayans.

Journalists, political figures and government-allied activists have all taken to platforms including Facebook and Twitter to call ethnic Tigrayans “traitors,” urge authorities to place them in “concentration camps” and encourage neighbors to “weed” them. Commenters on some posts listed neighborhoods where Tigrayans lived in the capital and urged the authorities to remove them.

Digital activists, including Frances Haugen, the Facebook whistle-blower, have long accused Facebook of failing to moderate hateful incitement speech. With pressure mounting, Facebook this month deleted a post by Mr. Abiy urging citizens to “bury” the Tigray People’s Liberation Front.

Twitter also disabled its Trends section in Ethiopia, citing “the risks of coordination that could incite violence or cause harm.”

Timnit Gebru, an Ethiopian-born American computer scientist who spotted and reported some of the posts on Facebook, said the measures were insufficient and amounted to “a game of whack-a-mole.”

For now, many Tigrayans worry that it’s only a matter of time before they are seized. One businessman, who paid a \$400 bribe for his release, said officers had told him they would come for him again.

It’s a fate Kirubel said he worried about as his disabled uncle and cousins remained detained.

“My children worry that I will not come back when I leave the house,” he said. “Everyone is afraid.”

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HEADLINE	11/16 Pfizer: Covid antiviral pill deal
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/health/covid-pill-pfizer.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Health
GIST	<p>DURBAN, South Africa — Pfizer announced a deal on Tuesday to allow its promising Covid-19 treatment to be made and sold inexpensively in 95 poorer nations that are home to more than half of the world’s population.</p> <p>The agreement follows a similar arrangement negotiated by Merck last month, and together the deals have the potential to vastly expand global production of two simple antiviral pills that could alter the course of the pandemic by preventing severe illness from the coronavirus.</p> <p>“The fact that we now have two manufacturer-anywhere licenses for these two drugs is a big change, and it draws a big contrast with the restrictive licensing so far for vaccines,” said James Love, who leads Knowledge Ecology International, a nonprofit that researches access to medical products.</p> <p>Under the agreement, Pfizer will grant a royalty-free license for the pill to the Medicines Patent Pool, a nonprofit backed by the United Nations, in a deal that will allow manufacturers to take out a sublicense. They will receive Pfizer’s formula for the drug, and be able to sell it for use in 95 developing countries, mostly in Africa and Asia, once regulators authorize the drug in those places. The organization reached a similar deal with Merck for its Covid antiviral pill, molnupiravir, to be made and sold inexpensively in 105 poorer countries.</p>

Nevertheless, there are serious concerns about whether this step will do enough to ensure sufficient supply of the drug for countries that continue to lack Covid vaccines.

Like the Merck deal, the Pfizer agreement excludes a number of poorer countries that have been hit hard by the virus. Brazil, which has one of the world's worst pandemic death tolls, as well as Cuba, Iraq, Libya and Jamaica, will have to buy pills directly from Pfizer, most likely at higher prices compared with what the generics manufacturers will charge, and those countries risk getting shut out of supplies. China and Russia — middle-income countries that are home to a combined 1.5 billion people — are excluded from both deals, as is Brazil.

Still, Pfizer's approach on its drug is markedly different from the way it has handled its Covid vaccine. The company has shipped more than two billion vaccine doses globally but sent only about 167 million of those to the developing countries that are home to about four billion people. It has not provided any manufacturers a license to make its Covid vaccine, for which it is on track to bring in \$36 billion in revenue this year.

In a key clinical trial, the Pfizer pill, which will be sold in wealthy countries under the brand name Paxlovid, was found to be [strongly effective](#) in preventing severe disease when given to high-risk unvaccinated study volunteers soon after they started showing Covid symptoms.

The pill is urgently needed in places where few people have yet had the opportunity to be vaccinated. And because it is a pill that can be taken at home, it will be much easier to distribute than treatments that are typically given intravenously.

"This is going to be really important for low- and-middle income countries, because it's easy to take, just a short course of five days, and potentially relatively cheap to produce," said Charles Gore, executive director of the Medicines Patent Pool.

But Felipe Carvalho, the coordinator of Doctors Without Borders' access-to-medicines campaign in Brazil, lamented his country's exclusion from the deal. "It is outrageous that a high-burden country like Brazil is once again left behind on access to treatment," he said. While his is an upper-middle-income country, he said, three-quarters of Brazilians rely on the public health system and few can afford expensive treatments.

For all their promise, the impact of the pills from Pfizer and Merck will depend on patients having access to affordable and easy-to-use Covid testing. The treatments must be given within a few days after symptoms start to be most effective, which experts predict will be challenging in wealthy countries and even more difficult in countries where people have less reliable access to health care providers.

Pfizer's own production of its treatment will be limited at first. The company says it can produce enough of the pills by the end of this year for 180,000 people — equivalent to about a one-week supply for everyone infected [in Florida](#) at the height of that state's Delta wave. The company expects to ramp up manufacturing, producing at least 50 million treatment courses in 2022, including 21 million or more in the first half of the year. Pfizer has said it will charge poorer countries less for the drug than wealthier ones.

Pfizer's treatment may have several advantages over Merck's drug: It appears to be more effective, according to trial data, and the way it stops the coronavirus from replicating seems to be safer, especially for use in pregnant women and women who may become pregnant. These factors are likely to increase demand for Pfizer's pill around the world.

[Australia](#) and [Britain](#) have already locked up some of Pfizer's supply of its pill. In the United States, where Pfizer is expected to soon apply for emergency authorization, no supply deal has yet been announced.

Unlike Merck, which also licensed its treatment to Indian generic drug manufacturers while it was still testing its drug, Pfizer has yet to make a deal directly with any generics drugmakers, a step that might have helped ensure larger supply.

Mr. Gore said that more than 20 companies had contacted the patents pool to express interest in a license to make Pfizer's drug and that production could start in the first quarter of next year. But access will also depend on how quickly regulatory bodies and the World Health Organization move to authorize the medication, he said.

Stephen Saad, the chief executive of Aspen Pharmacare, a South African drugmaker, said his firm would probably apply for a sublicense to make a generic version of the drug and aim to sell it for about \$10 a course across Africa. However, he said he could not predict how soon the company would be able to produce the drug because as yet Aspen knows nothing about what will be involved in making it or what supply of raw ingredients is available.

Pfizer's treatment is meant to be taken at home as a five-day regimen of 30 pills. Ten of the pills are a low dose of an H.I.V. drug known as ritonavir, meant to slow the breakdown of Pfizer's pill so that it remains active in the body longer.

Generics manufacturers around the world produce ritonavir, but success of the Covid treatment will depend on that drug's availability. A spokesman for Pfizer, Kit Longley, said the company did not foresee any supply concerns with ritonavir.

When both the Merck and Pfizer drugs are available as generics, it will be possible for doctors to use the two together as a treatment that could keep even more people out of struggling hospitals. Mr. Gore cited experiences with other viruses, including H.I.V. and hepatitis C, for which antivirals have proven more effective taken in combination.

Advocates for health equity said that the Pfizer deal did far too little to address the crisis that has been created by the huge disparity in vaccine access. "Is this the best we can do in a pandemic?" said Fatima Hassan, the director of a South African organization called the Health Justice Initiative. "Who makes these decisions? What's the rationale for Brazil being excluded? There's nothing we can do with the M.P.P. or Pfizer to get them included: It's take it or leave it. So you take whatever scraps come your way, because how can you say no?"

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HEADLINE	11/16 Schools close: substitute teacher shortage
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/16/substitute-teacher-shortage-increasingly-closes-pu/
GIST	<p>Public schools across the country have been temporarily closing their doors and canceling classes this holiday season — not to recognize any religious observance but to manage a shortage of substitute teachers.</p> <p>Several schools in the Seattle area canceled classes last Friday, and Maryland's Montgomery County Public Schools will close the day before Thanksgiving. Eastpointe Community Schools in Michigan moved its middle schools back to remote instruction last week. Meanwhile, school systems from California to Texas are offering more money to attract substitute teachers.</p> <p>A scarcity of substitute teachers compounds a national labor shortage that has forced businesses and agencies to scramble and compete for workers as the economy regains its footing after pandemic-related closures and mandates.</p> <p>Jim Politis, president of the National Substitute Teachers Alliance, said the shortage reflects "people questioning the old standards that apply to the job."</p>

“Substitute teachers feel they don’t get much respect, they know they don’t get much pay and they know that sometimes the job is difficult,” Mr. Politis, a substitute teacher in Maryland’s Montgomery County Public Schools, told The Washington Times.

Mr. Politis, 81, said that retired teachers like himself have kept many school systems afloat during the pandemic. He retired from full-time teaching in 1999 after 32 years.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said that staffing shortages before COVID-19 “and the pandemic has only made them more acute.”

“Between the increased stress of the job and the loss of one million jobs in public education earlier in the pandemic, schools are still struggling to find staff, particularly nurses, guidance counselors and bus drivers,” Ms. Weingarten said in an email.

Before the pandemic, she said, “teachers were facing a lack of respect on the job, routinely taking money out of their own pockets for classroom supplies while at the same time paying student loans and cobbling together multiple jobs to make ends meet.

“Now, they’re confronted with the exhaustion and burnout of the last few years,” said Ms. Weingarten, leader of the nation’s second-largest teachers union.

The National Education Association, the nation’s largest teachers union, did not respond to a request for comment.

According to the National Substitute Teachers Alliance, the national average pay for substitute educators is about \$105 per full day. Some substitutes also receive benefits.

The national average pay for full-time teachers was \$63,645 in 2019-2020, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Joyce Rankin, a member of the Colorado State Board of Education, said the teacher shortage reflects broader workforce trends across the country.

“It’s not unlike the need for workers throughout the workforce,” Ms. Rankin told The Times. “You can see this every day as businesses continue to display ‘Help Wanted’ signs. Why should teaching be any different?”

In Colorado, Jefferson County Public Schools have offered a temporary \$50-a-day increase in substitute teaching pay for the current school year. Since the basic pay rate starts at \$100 a day, the 50% increase “should be an attractive incentive to some,” according to analyst Pam Benigno at the Denver-based Independence Institute.

“Substitute teachers, for too long, have been underpaid and underappreciated,” said Ms. Benigno, director of the libertarian think tank’s Education Policy Center.

But many teacher vacancies remain in Colorado and elsewhere.

Rebecca Friedrichs, founder of the educational reform group For Kids and Country, attributed the crisis in part to “the working conditions put into place by the teacher unions” that push veteran teachers to miss school more often and take early retirement.

“No teacher wants to teach to students online or through a mask,” said Ms. Friedrichs, a 28-year veteran elementary school teacher in Southern California. “Who wants to work in that chaos?”

“I have heard many teachers express frustration, and they are ready to throw in the towel and either quit or retire,” she added.

Erika Sanzi, director of outreach for the nonprofit parental rights group Parents Defending Education, said “the sub shortage is front and center because of the unacceptable number of schools still unable or unwilling to provide in-person learning five days a week.”

“We are seeing national union leaders make the case that teachers are too burnt out and exhausted to come to work five days a week, and that is not going to sit well with parents who continued to go to work throughout the pandemic or had to leave the workforce to oversee ‘Zoom school’ at their kitchen table,” Ms. Sanzi said.

She added that the “lack of subs is not surprising after so many months during which they had no option” to work in-person on campuses already struggling with increases in student behavioral problems and the elimination of school resource officers.

While it may help schools to hire a permanent pool of full-time substitutes with full benefits, Ms. Sanzi said “that is not going to solve anything when so many teachers are out on the same day that a school literally can’t even open.”

To deal with a shortage of more than 300 teachers, the public schools superintendent of Palm Beach County, Florida — the nation’s 10th largest school district — last month instituted a policy requiring all “noninstructional staff,” including administrators, to serve as substitute teachers one day each month. Superintendent Michael Burke, who has a degree in finance, subbed at a West Palm Beach elementary school, WPTV reported.

Some states have tried to grow their substitute pools by dropping requirements for bachelor’s degrees and speeding up the certification process. Missouri last month approved a 20-hour online substitute certification course, while Oregon has temporarily dropped the bachelor’s degree requirement in some cases.

In an Oct. 26 essay for the nonprofit education news source Chalkbeat, former middle school substitute teacher Walt Stallings wrote that many like him quit their jobs last summer when it became clear conditions would not improve in the schools this year.

“After a traumatic and exhausting school year, our wages didn’t allow us any time to recoup. The burnout and frustration in the classrooms was palpable,” wrote Mr. Stallings, now a writing instructor at DePaul University.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Study: China soars past US total wealth
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/16/china-soars-past-us-total-wealth-joining-wto-study/
GIST	<p>China has overtaken the U.S. as the world leader in total wealth, vastly increasing its national net worth since joining the World Trade Organization nearly 20 years ago, according to a new study.</p> <p>China’s net worth has soared to \$120 trillion, up from \$7 trillion in 2000, the year before Beijing joined the WTO, Bloomberg reported, citing a report by consultants McKinsey & Co.</p> <p>Wealth in the U.S. more than doubled during the same period to \$90 trillion, the report found. China’s population of 1.44 billion people is also more than four times as large as that of the United States.</p> <p>Beijing still enjoys preferential developing-nation status in the WTO, amid increasing complaints by other nations that China engages in unfair trade practices. The status gives China certain developing country privileges, including the right to restrict imports to protect key domestic industries.</p> <p>During their first virtual summit on Monday night, President Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed the “importance of managing competition responsibly,” the White House said.</p>

Mr. Biden “was clear about the need to protect American workers and industries from the PRC’s unfair trade and economic practices,” the statement said.

Analysts say China is not on track to meet its commitment for purchasing U.S. products under a trade agreement forged during the Trump administration. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said before the virtual summit that Mr. Biden would “express areas where he feels China should be taking additional action,” but she said the president is largely delegating trade issues to U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai.

“It’s really under her purview. He entrusts her to do that,” Ms. Psaki said.

Since joining the WTO, China has increased its foreign trade by ninefold, jumping ahead of the U.S. to become the global leader, Nikkei Asia reported last month. Beijing’s exports jumped 870% and imports rose 740% from 2001 to 2020, according to the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development.

China’s total trade value skyrocketed 810%, far higher than the overall global average increase of 180%, the report stated.

At a WTO review last month in Geneva, China came under heavy criticism from other industrialized nations that it has benefited significantly from its trade status even as it flouted global trading rules and rose to a status as an economic superpower.

“China has increasingly tested global trade rules and norms by engaging in practices that are inconsistent with its WTO commitments,” the Australian government said in a statement. It cited new Chinese restrictions on numerous Australian exports, including beef, coal and sugar.

A top U.S. official at the review also criticized China for unfair trade practices, including preferential treatment for state enterprises and cyber theft of American intellectual property.

China in turn has complained about a tariff war initiated by the Trump administration against its exporters. Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao said China “has stayed committed to deepening reform, expanding, opening up and growing its open economy at a higher level.”

U.S. GDP on a per capita basis remains nearly six times higher than for China.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Report: children died by starvation Tigray
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/16/children-starving-to-death-in-ethiopias-tigray-conflict-report
GIST	<p>Almost 200 children under the age of five died of starvation in 14 hospitals across Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region between late June and October, according to data collected by local doctors and researchers.</p> <p>The research, shared with Agence France-Presse by Dr Hagos Godefay, the former head of the health bureau in the pre-conflict Tigrayan government, offers a snapshot of the suffering in Tigray, where a communications blackout by federal authorities has prevented a full examination of the toll of the war.</p> <p>The region is also being subjected to what the UN has described as a de facto aid blockade, meaning most essential medical supplies are no longer available.</p> <p>Hagos told the news agency that 186 children under five had died from severe acute malnutrition in the 14 hospitals still functioning in Tigray, and condemned the blockade and its impact on medical services as “collective punishment”.</p>

Hospitals were experiencing three to four deaths a week from ordinarily treatable illnesses such as pneumonia and diarrhoea, Hagos said, and tens of thousands of people are in urgent need of “chronic follow-up” treatments and care for conditions such as HIV, cancer and diabetes.

“If we are not able to manage them, if we are not able to provide them drugs ... it’s catastrophic,” he said.

Hagos said according to data collected by doctors in hospitals as well as through household surveys by doctors and university researchers in the region, 29% of children in Tigray are acutely malnourished, up from 9% before the war. For severe acute malnutrition, the figure is 7.1%, up from 1.3%, he said.

Ethiopia’s prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, sent troops into Tigray in November 2020 in an attempt to remove the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, in response, he said, to TPLF attacks on army camps.

Since then thousands of people have been killed, thousands detained and millions displaced in Tigray, and more recently the Amhara region. The conflict itself and the prominence of ethnic militia groups and Eritrean forces have blown open historic regional and ethnic fault-lines in Africa’s second most populous country.

Abiy’s government has rejected claims it is blocking aid to Tigray, saying access has been restricted because of TPLF advances into the neighbouring Amhara and Afar regions.

Earlier this month, eight other rebel groups, including the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) – a historical foe of the TPLF – announced it was joining the Tigrayan forces in the conflict.

In late October, TPLF forces said they had seized control of the strategic cities of Dessie and Kombolcha, positioning them to move down a major road towards Addis Ababa, and raising fears of an attack on the capital.

In recent weeks, Ethiopian authorities have accelerated the arrests of thousands of Tigrayans in the capital and across the country, as part of sweeping state of emergency provisions announced on 2 November. As many as 1,000 people are reported to have been arrested in the past week, according to Liz Throssell, a spokesperson for the the UN’s high commissioner for human rights.

The government has defended the arrests, saying it was detaining those suspected of supporting TPLF forces approaching Addis Ababa. The UN, rights groups, relatives and a government-created Ethiopian human rights commission have said the detentions, including of children and elderly people, appear to be on the basis of ethnicity.

“We are concerned that arrests have been continuing over the last week in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, as well as in Gondar, Bahir Dar and other locations, as police invoke the excessively wide provisions of the state of emergency,” Throssell said at a press briefing on Tuesday.

“These developments are all the more disturbing given that most of those detained are reported to be people of Tigrayan origin, arrested often on suspicion of being affiliated to or supporting the TPLF.”

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HEADLINE	11/16 Shoppers boost spending despite inflation
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-economy-october-2021-retail-sales-11637009365?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>American consumers spent more at the start of the holiday shopping season, brushing off concerns about higher prices at retailers last month.</p> <p>Sales at U.S. retail stores, online sellers, and restaurants rose by a seasonally adjusted 1.7% in October compared with the previous month, the Commerce Department said. Consumers continued their stepped-up spending despite continued Covid-19 fears and inflation concerns.</p>

Spending rose sharply, by 4%, at online retailers, along with big gains at electronics, appliance and hardware stores. Grocery-store sales rose by 1.1% while restaurant and bar sales were flat. Other gains occurred at gas stations, where sales rose 3.9%, and auto dealerships, with a 1.8% gain.

[Walmart](#) Inc. on Tuesday [reported higher sales in the third quarter](#), saying it increased prices as more consumers shopped early for the holidays. The retailer said U.S. inventory rose as it prepare for “an expected strong holiday season.” [Home Depot](#) Inc., among several retailers reporting earnings this week, said [its third-quarter results were better than expected](#).

The elevated spending levels suggest solid holiday sales this month and next. Consumers have said they are worried about inflation, which hit a three-decade high last month, but planned to continue spending.

“Consumers say they’re pessimistic—we have had very high inflation—but the truth is they’re in very good shape right now,” said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial Services Group. As reasons for the robust demand for goods he cited the roughly \$2 trillion in excess savings that households have accrued since the start of the pandemic, as well as low interest rates and an improving labor market.

Core retail sales, a measurement that excludes spending on autos, gasoline, building materials and food services, were up 1.6%, showing that consumers increased discretionary spending in addition to taking on higher prices for necessary goods. Spending at sporting goods, hobby, musical instrument and book stores was up 1.5% and rose by 2.2% at department stores. Pharmacies and clothing stores both saw modest declines from the previous month.

The combination of strong demand, [snarled supply chains](#), higher prices and an [unbalanced labor market](#) is making for an unusual holiday season where record sales may be accompanied by shortages and long waits for goods. Inflation may also start to cut into demand for consumers with lower incomes who may put off purchases due to price increases, economists say.

Norm Bruce, who with his wife, Eve, owns Martha Merrell’s Books and Toys in Waukesha, Wis., said that he expected strong holiday sales. A winter farmers market they set up in front of their Main Street store was a success the first weekend of November, and they plan to continue to use the weekly event to help attract customers. But supply-chain issues and rising prices are taking their toll.

“We’re telling our customers right now, if you see it, buy it. We don’t have 10 or 20 copies of a book right now, we have maybe 1 or 2,” Mr. Bruce said.

Most books have prices printed directly on the jacket, preventing Mr. Bruce from charging more. But to keep up with supply pressures, the store has had to raise prices on some other items, giving some customers sticker shock.

“All of a sudden, I was having to put increases of \$4 or \$5 on stuffed animals, because the shipping cost has gone up tremendously,” Mr. Bruce said. “Consumers right now are very forgiving, but when the prices start going up, they say, that’s a stuffed dog, I don’t want to pay that much.”

Retail sales figures aren’t adjusted for inflation, so some of the increase can be attributed to higher prices. The backup in the supply chain shows few signs of easing, as container ships struggle to unload their cargo at U.S. ports. Containers can wait weeks before they are picked up by trucking companies, which say they can’t find enough drivers to meet demand.

The resulting inflation, if left unchecked, could start eating into consumers’ budgets enough to tamp down on the elevated demand for goods, Mr. Faucher said. But there are strong incentives for retailers to get their supply chains sorted out.

“If you can find out how to get your product to consumers when they’re having trouble finding things, you’re going to make a lot of money,” he said.

Companies attempting to get ahead of the holiday crush may have simply [moved it forward by a few weeks](#), according to a study by Panjiva, the supply-chain research unit of S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Imports are up 20.5% compared with 2019. And individual companies are experiencing longer shipping times for goods, which then prompts them to order goods even earlier ahead of peak shopping times.

Online shopping has dominated the early days of the holiday retail rush, but that is expected to shift to in-store shopping as the holidays get closer and customers try to avoid shipping delays. And some gift-givers may choose to opt out of material gifts altogether.

“Gift card and digital e-gift card sales have also been trending up recently which could continue to be a theme through the holidays,” said Felipe Chacon, an economist at payments company Square.

Labor shortages are also contributing to price increases as businesses struggle to meet customer demand. Maureen Craig, who owns the Southern Cajun-Creole restaurant Alligator Soul in Savannah, Ga., said that the main thing preventing her from having her best year ever is inability to find enough staff.

Restaurant and bar sales remained flat between September and October, a sign of weakness in the recovery for [an industry that has struggled](#) with a wave of quitting employees, high food prices and persistently high Covid-19 case levels. Restaurants, especially in northern states, are bracing for another winter dependent in part on outdoor dining as some customers remain reluctant to dine indoors.

“It’s been very, very difficult to hire—more in the kitchen than in the front of the house,” Ms. Craig said. She recently decided to close the restaurant on Sundays to alleviate some of the pressure on her chef and kitchen staff. Customers have taken it in stride when she calls them to tell them she has to switch their reservations.

“Everyone understands it’s an impossible time right now,” she said. “I don’t want to sacrifice their experience for the almighty dollar.”

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HEADLINE	11/16 Iran resumes nuclear parts production
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-resumes-production-of-advanced-nuclear-program-parts-diplomats-say-11637079334?mod=hp_lead_pos4
GIST	<p>Iran has resumed production of equipment for advanced centrifuges at a site the United Nations’ atomic energy agency has been unable to monitor or gain access to for months, said diplomats familiar with the activities, presenting a new challenge for the Biden administration as it prepares for nuclear talks.</p> <p>The renewed work has raised fresh concerns among Western diplomats who say it could allow Iran to start secretly diverting centrifuge parts if Tehran chose to build a covert nuclear-weapons program, although they say there is no evidence at this point that it has done so.</p> <p>Iran resumed work on a limited scale in late August at an assembly plant in Karaj, a city west of Tehran, and has since accelerated its production, allowing it to manufacture an unknown number of rotors and bellows for more advanced centrifuges, diplomats said. Iran had stopped work at Karaj in June after a sabotage attack that Tehran blamed on Israel, which hasn’t acknowledged responsibility.</p> <p>According to the diplomats, Iran has now produced significant amounts of centrifuge parts since late August, with one of the diplomats saying it has produced parts for at least 170 advanced centrifuges. Centrifuges are used to spin enriched uranium into higher levels of purity either for civilian use or, at 90% purity, for nuclear weapons.</p> <p>Iran has withdrawn from most commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal since the Trump administration reimposed sweeping sanctions in November 2018. In February, Iran scaled back</p>

International Atomic Energy Agency oversight of many of its nuclear-related sites, including Karaj, but agreed to keep agency cameras and recording devices in place at Karaj and a series of other sights.

All of the recent work at Karaj has taken place without any official IAEA monitoring, the diplomats said. Iran significantly tightened security at Karaj after the June alleged sabotage, the latest in a series of explosions at its nuclear facilities over the past two years.

Iran's production of centrifuges is a critical issue in talks beginning Nov. 29 to revive the nuclear deal, which the Biden administration is hoping to restore after former President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from it in May 2018.

The original deal was built around the idea that Iran should be kept at least one year away from being able to produce enough nuclear fuel for one bomb—its so-called breakout time. Since the U.S. exited the deal, Iran has installed more than 1,000 more advanced centrifuges, which are able to enrich uranium more quickly. That has helped reduce Iran's current breakout time to as little as a month.

The IAEA has echoed Western concerns in recent weeks that Iran's nuclear activities are no longer being fully tracked, saying in September that Iran's failure to restore cameras to Karaj is "seriously compromising" the agency's ability to ensure continuous knowledge about the nuclear program.

According to one of the diplomats familiar with Iran's program, Iran has installed the centrifuges whose key parts were produced at Karaj at Iran's underground, heavily fortified, Fordow site. The diplomat said there is no evidence the centrifuges parts have been diverted elsewhere but "as the number of unmonitored centrifuges increases, the likelihood for this scenario increases."

There is no evidence Iran has a covert nuclear program, the diplomats said, and Iran's core nuclear facilities, including Fordow and Natanz, which produce enriched uranium, remain under IAEA oversight. Iran says its nuclear activities are purely peaceful.

The IAEA didn't respond to a request for comment. The agency is expected to issue its latest report on Iran's nuclear program this week. There was no immediate response from Iran's IAEA mission.

Iran's work at Karaj creates a new complication for nuclear talks, which are already shaping up to be extremely tough due to major differences between the U.S. and Iran's new hard-line government under President Ebrahim Raisi on restoring the deal.

Western diplomats have warned that without a clear understanding of what material and equipment Iran has now, it is harder to reach an agreement that ensures effective but temporary restrictions on Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for the lifting of most international sanctions.

Tensions over monitoring have been growing for months between the agency and Iran.

Iran in February suspended oversight of its uranium mines, yellowcake facilities and centrifuge assembly plants, including Karaj, which were supposed to be kept under IAEA cameras and other supervision under the 2015 nuclear deal.

However, Iran made a side deal at the time that the IAEA could keep cameras and other recording equipment going at the sites and that Tehran would store and hand over the footage in future to the agency if a deal was struck on reviving the 2015 accord.

In September, after a last-minute visit to Tehran, IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi won Iran's agreement for inspectors to access these facilities to reset cameras and other monitoring equipment.

However, in late September, the IAEA said Iran had reneged on its commitment to allow inspectors into Karaj to replace four cameras that had been removed from the site after the June sabotage. Iran claimed it had never agreed to allow access to Karaj.

	<p>In its quarterly report on Iran in September, the IAEA reported that it asked for access to Karaj in late August—a request that wasn't granted—and was seeking the whereabouts of missing footage from one of those cameras.</p> <p>On Friday, Mr. Grossi confirmed at a news conference the IAEA still had been given no access to Karaj, saying it would be “very problematic” if the issue wasn't resolved.</p> <p>However, even as the agency was first seeking access to Karaj in late August, Iran had started work again at the assembly plant, which satellite imagery showed was badly damaged in the June sabotage. Work started initially on only a few machines before expanding.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 US population center moves 11.8 miles
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/us-population-center-moves-11-8-miles-still-in-missouri/
GIST	<p>HARTVILLE, Mo. (AP) — Some people might describe Hartville, Missouri, as being in the middle of nowhere, but the U.S. Census Bureau on Tuesday announced that it's the closest town to the middle of the nation.</p> <p>The hamlet of about 600 people in the Missouri Ozarks is located about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the center of the U.S. population distribution, according to the Census Bureau.</p> <p>The nation's population center is calculated every 10 years after the once-a-decade census shows where people are living. The heart of America has been located in Missouri since 1980.</p> <p>The U.S. population center, previously located in Plato, Missouri, in the neighboring county, moved only 11.8 miles (19 kilometers) from 2010 to 2020. It is the smallest distant shift in 100 years and the second-smallest in U.S. history.</p> <p>To calculate the center of the U.S., the Census Bureau figures out which spot would be “the balance point” if the 50 states were located on an imaginary, flat surface with weights of identical size — each representing the location of one person — placed on it.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Navy: sailors refuse vax to be discharged
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/navy-sailors-refuse-covid-19-vaccine-discharged-administrative-actions
GIST	<p>U.S. Navy sailors who refuse to comply with the coronavirus vaccine mandate will be discharged and could face other administrative actions.</p> <p>"In order to ensure a fully vaccinated force, U.S. Navy policy is to process for separation all Navy service members who refuse the lawful order to receive the COVID-19 vaccination and do not have an approved exemption," the NAVADMIN said in a statement Monday.</p> <p>The COVID Consolidated Disposition Authority, led by Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr. and Chief of Naval Reserve Vice Adm. John Mustin, will also separate sailors who fail to get the vaccine. Sailors who don't comply and are only separated for refusing the vaccine could receive as low as a general discharge under honorable conditions, Navy Times reported.</p> <p>Active-duty sailors had until Nov. 14 to get their last dose of the vaccine, in order to be fully vaccinated by Nov. 28. Members of the Navy Reserve have until Dec. 14 to get their last dose of the vaccine.</p> <p>Sailors who reject the vaccine could also lose education benefits, promotions and bonus pay.</p>

	<p>"Bonuses, special pays and incentive pays become unearned when a Navy service member refusing the vaccine is no longer performing duties for which they are receiving such a bonus, special pay, or incentive pay," the NAVADMIN states.</p> <p>"Navy service members refusing the vaccine who are in a frocked status should be defrocked as soon as feasible," the statement added.</p> <p>Sailors who are denied religious or medical exemptions have five days to start the process of getting fully vaccinated or the Navy begins the separation process.</p> <p>Ninety-six percent of active-duty sailors and 93 percent of the total force are fully vaccinated, according to data from the Navy on Nov. 10. The branch has not approved any religious exemption requests, Navy Times reported, and only six permanent medical exemptions were approved.</p> <p>The Department of Defense announced in late August that all members of the military must get vaccinated, President Biden mandated that all federal employees be fully vaccinated by Nov. 22.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Germany suspends Nord Stream 2 approval
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/16/business/news-business-stock-market#germany-gas-pipeline
GIST	<p>BERLIN — A German regulator on Tuesday suspended its certification of Nord Stream 2, an undersea pipeline intended to transport natural gas directly to Germany from Russia that has been the source of a long-running dispute between Berlin, Washington and Brussels.</p> <p>The action means that the recently completed pipeline will not begin supplying gas to Germany anytime soon, and comes against the backdrop of a politically charged jump in energy prices in Europe and tensions between Moscow and Europe over Belarus and Ukraine.</p> <p>The news caused a jump in European natural gas markets, with the price of U.K. natural gas futures soaring more than 9 percent on Tuesday.</p> <p>It also comes as Germany finds itself in political limbo, with Chancellor Angela Merkel, a firm supporter of the pipeline project, reduced to a caretaker role while leaders from the Social Democratic, Green and Free Democratic parties debate the makeup of a new government, one that has the potential to be less favorable to its predecessor's pet energy project.</p> <p>In its ruling, Germany's Federal Network Agency, which oversees the country's essential infrastructure, said that the decision of the Swiss company that owns the pipeline to set up a subsidiary in Germany meant that more paperwork was required. Once the subsidiary has met the necessary bureaucratic requirements, an evaluation can begin anew.</p> <p>The German agency does not have the final say in the project, which also requires approval from the European Commission that can only be taken up once the German agency has signed off — meaning Europe could be well into spring before any gas would be flowing.</p> <p>That is if the political tensions do not get in the way.</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has pushed for the German regulators to approve the pipeline as a way of easing Europe's natural gas crisis, telling an energy conference in October that Moscow would "expand supplies" along the 750-mile pipeline once it received regulatory approval. Many in Europe suspect the Russian leader has deliberately held back natural gas to create pressure to approve the new pipeline.</p> <p>But when Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, the leader of Belarus, threatened to cut off supplies of Russian natural gas that flow through his country to Europe — a retaliation for recent European Union sanctions</p>

	<p>over fraud in claiming a sweeping re-election victory in August and for harsh suppression of dissent — Mr. Putin chastised him, telling Europeans that he had spoken in anger.</p> <p>The United States opposed Nord Stream 2 for years, but in July, the Biden administration waived a threat to impose sanctions to block the project after concluding that the pipeline could not be stopped without a counterproductive fight with Germany.</p> <p>Poland and other Eastern European countries have also argued against Nord Stream 2, fearing the additional reliance on Russia. Ukraine has argued that the pipeline could cost it \$2 billion in annual transit revenue it earns from a pipeline from Russia that runs through its territory, and makes it more susceptible to energy extortion by Russia.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 China Communist Party revises history
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/world/asia/china-history-xi-jinping.html
GIST	<p>Xi Jinping's drive to extend his formidable power for years ahead reached a new pitch on Tuesday, when the Chinese Communist Party issued a resolution on history that anoints him one of its revered leaders, hours after Mr. Xi held video talks with President Biden.</p> <p>Senior party officials approved the resolution last week, when some of its main points were released in an official summary of their meeting. But the government has only belatedly issued the full document, the third such summation of history in the 100 years of the Chinese Communist Party. Scholars, investors and government analysts will parse the resolution for what it reveals about Mr. Xi's worldview and intentions.</p> <p>Here are some initial takeaways.</p> <p>Elevating Xi Jinping The implications of the Chinese Communist Party's jargon-riddled speeches and documents can sometimes be elusive. Not this time.</p> <p>A chorus of official speeches and editorials has emphasized that the resolution had one main goal: to cement Mr. Xi's status as a transformational leader essential to ensuring China's rise.</p> <p>Roughly two-thirds of the document is devoted to Mr. Xi's nine years in power and the changes he has brought in politics, economics, foreign policy and other areas. Mr. Xi's name appears 22 times in the resolution; Mao Zedong gets 18 mentions, and Deng Xiaoping six. Mr. Xi's immediate predecessor, Hu Jintao — in power for a decade — receives one mention.</p> <p>As is the way in Chinese politics, the elevation of Mr. Xi already has its own slogan embedded in the resolution: "The two establishments" ("Liang ge queli") — that is, establishing Mr. Xi as China's "core" leader and establishing his ideas as China's bedrock official doctrine. Party cadres have repeated that slogan in speech after speech since the Central Committee approved the move last week.</p> <p>Officials must show "absolute loyalty to the core, resolutely defend the core, closely and constantly follow the core," said the official account of a meeting about the resolution in Shandong Province, eastern China.</p> <p>Mr. Xi was already powerful before the history resolution, but the document appears intended to propel him into a new phase of influence before a Communist Party congress next year. That congress is likely to give Mr. Xi a third five-year term as party leader, breaking with the two-term pattern that emerged under his predecessors. It will also add political urgency to his policy priorities, including a "common prosperity" program intended to rein in economic inequality, as well as efforts to strengthen China's homegrown technological capabilities.</p> <p>Handling history carefully</p>

The history resolution sets him in the party's firmament of epoch-defining leaders, alongside [Mao Zedong](#) and [Deng Xiaoping](#). Mao led China to stand up against oppression; Deng led it to prosperity; and now Mr. Xi is leading it to strength — so goes the three-stage description of China's rise repeated in the resolution.

Assessing Deng's legacy presented Mr. Xi with a tricky issue: If Deng and his handpicked successors — Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao — were so successful, what justified the sharp shift to more centralized, authoritarian control that Mr. Xi has overseen? On the other hand, Mr. Xi's claims to be an economic reformer could suffer if he denigrated Deng, who is still widely revered in China.

The resolution praises the Deng era for unleashing China's economic growth, and also defends Deng's decision to use armed force to [crush pro-democracy protests](#) that spread across China in 1989. "Reform and opening up was a crucial step in determining the fate of contemporary China," it says.

Yet the resolution also bluntly argues that problems had piled up before 2012, when Mr. Xi came to power: corruption, political ill-discipline and lack of faith in the party, as well as wider problems such as industrial pollution and inefficient growth. His immediate predecessors, it suggests, had let things drift.

"The external environment was bringing many new dangers and challenges," the resolution says of the time before Mr. Xi took office. Inside the Communist Party, it adds, corruption was spreading. "Some party members and officials experienced grave crises in their political faith."

Defending Mao

Confronting Mao's legacy also presented potential pitfalls. Under Mr. Xi, the party has stepped up censorship to defend Mao from criticism. The authorities have curtailed research and teaching on the disastrous decades of Mao's rule. But going too far in defending Mao could be risky, too.

Mr. Xi has faced criticism that his hard-line campaigns against political disloyalty risk reviving parts of China's Maoist past. Mr. Xi has not shown interest in unleashing turbulent Mao-like mass campaigns, so he has tried to acknowledge Mao's excesses while strongly defending Mao's overall record.

The resolution praises Mao as the founder of the People's Republic and credits him with creating a new China, free of foreign imperialism. It devotes just one broadly phrased paragraph to summing up the worst calamities of Mao's era, including the Great Leap Forward, the attempt to drive China toward Communism that ended in mass famine, and the Cultural Revolution, when fighting and purges convulsed the country.

"Although there were severe setbacks during the course of exploration" under Mao, the resolution says, China scored "massive achievements."

No regrets

The resolution shows no hints of Mr. Xi's acknowledging any missteps in his own nine years in power. On the contrary, much of the resolution describes his successes in stamping out corruption, reducing poverty and eliminating political opposition to Communist Party rule in mainland China, as well as in Hong Kong. Before Mr. Xi took office, the resolution says, China's "capacity to safeguard its national security was lacking."

Nor does the resolution nod to any of the criticisms made by foreign politicians that China's hectoring, heavy-handed diplomacy has needlessly riled other countries. The resolution says that Mr. Xi has expanded China's international circle of friends and influence. But it warns that the party needs to remain tough to cope with dangers ahead.

"Constant retreat will only bring bullying from those who grab a yard if you give an inch," says the resolution. "Making concessions to get our way will only draw us into more humiliating straits."

HEADLINE	11/16 Racial equity infrastructure left to states
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/us/politics/infrastructure-bill-racial-equity.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden’s \$1 trillion plan to rebuild America’s infrastructure comes with a built-in promise: No longer will roads, bridges and railways be instruments of bias or racism. Communities that ended up divided along racial lines will be made whole.</p> <p>But the decision about how to spend the money falls largely to the states, not all of which are likely to put as high a priority on that promise as Mr. Biden does, raising questions about whether the legislation will deliver on his goal.</p> <p>“It’s hard to have a national approach when the decisions are made state by state,” said Beth Osborne, who was an acting assistant secretary in the Transportation Department during the Obama administration. “A fundamental part of this program has always been to have the feds raise money, hand it over to the states and cross our fingers.”</p> <p>The administration has said it aims to repair the damage from the United States’ history of racial disparities in how the government builds, repairs and locates physical infrastructure. In the 1950s and 1960s, highway projects often targeted Black neighborhoods, destroying cultural and economic centers and bringing decades of environmental harm. State and local officials often steered roads through Black communities, isolating them from parks or economic gain.</p> <p>The task is complicated by a tangle of competing priorities. Some state and local governments might not share the Biden administration’s vision for racial equity; others might be aligned with the president politically, but would choose to spend the money differently. And the sheer size of the bill — it is the largest infusion of federal investment into infrastructure projects in more than a decade, touching nearly every facet of the American economy — makes it difficult to track every penny.</p> <p>About \$660 billion will be provided to the Transportation Department, the bulk of which will be directly distributed to states, who will have broad latitude in how to spend it. The package also includes about \$211 billion in “discretionary grants” that require approval from the department.</p> <p>Dorothy Wiley, whose Louisiana home sits in the path of a proposed highway expansion, said that while she was encouraged by the president’s pledges for racial equity, she was worried the federal government has limited say over the spending.</p> <p>The plan to expand Interstate 49, which has been delayed for years and is undergoing an environmental analysis, would cut through the community of Allendale, which neighbors the district once home to blues singer Huddie William Ledbetter, better known as “Lead Belly.”</p> <p>While business leaders in the community say the highway would connect the town to economic hubs in Louisiana, Ms. Wiley worries it will displace her church and neighbors.</p> <p>“Looking at where I live right now, it’s like they want to push us out farther and, well, it will gentrify the community,” said Ms. Wiley, the president of an organization opposing the development. “My hope is that it won’t be the same but I feel like it will.”</p> <p>Shawn Wilson, the secretary of Louisiana’s Department of Transportation, said he was weighing the concerns of Ms. Wiley, as well as the views of members of the business community who say the project would connect Allendale to other cities in Louisiana and nearby states, generating millions in economic value for the communities.</p> <p>Mr. Wilson, who was recently elected the president of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, a nonprofit representing state transportation departments, has yet to reach a decision on how the state should proceed.</p>

But he said the federal government had informed him that Louisiana's chances of getting money from the discretionary fund would depend on whether the state's projects factor in racial equity and climate change. That discretionary money, he said, would be necessary to complete any expansion.

Mr. Wilson said the views of the local community would be paramount.

"We're going to ask them to live with this infrastructure. We're going to ask them to invest local dollars in this infrastructure," he said. "And if we don't do it right, they're going to have to deal with the consequences of this infrastructure."

Federal officials say there are provisions in place to encourage states to take equity into account. Transportation Department officials have been working with the Domestic Policy Council, headed by Susan Rice, who leads the president's racial equity initiative, to reach out to local governments to implement the infrastructure package.

Christopher Coes, principal deputy assistant secretary for transportation policy, said projects that prioritize racial equity would be more likely to receive funding from the discretionary grants. He added that the administration would "use every tool in our arsenal, both hard and soft" to ensure that outcome.

The administration also notes that it already has made an effort to use new criteria in approving grants. In June, the Transportation Department awarded \$905 million for two dozen state projects and [considered climate change, environmental justice and racial equity](#) in its criteria for the first time.

Mr. Coes also said the administration has already taken aggressive measures, including in March when the Transportation Department took the rare step of invoking the Civil Rights Act to pause a massive highway project in Houston.

In a letter to the state, federal officials asked Texas to halt the project, which would expand Interstate 45, while they investigated the civil rights and environmental concerns raised by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas and local groups.

The highway plan would displace more than 1,000 homes, 344 businesses, five places of worship and two schools, according to an [environmental impact report](#) from the Texas Department of Transportation. Local [activists](#) who oppose the plan said the expansion would disproportionately affect low-income residents and tear through Black and Latino communities.

Sean Jefferson, who lives in Houston's Fifth Ward, one of the city's historic Black neighborhoods, said he was informed by state officials that his home of nine years would be demolished under the plan. Although he said that he would receive financial compensation, he would not be able to afford a new place in the same neighborhood. For now, Mr. Jefferson is staying in his house, "praying and hoping" that federal officials permanently stop the project.

Texas officials said such expansions were crucial for strengthening economic opportunity, particularly with a growing population.

"It will bring much-needed and significant improvements to I-45 to enhance safety and mobility as our state continues to see robust population growth and freight traffic," said Bob Kaufman, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Transportation.

But Mr. Jefferson said he feared that the highway project would continue to displace members of the community; many of his neighbors already had been forced to move because of rising prices and the development of townhouses over recent years.

"I'm just scared about what's going to happen," he said. "We've been staying with each other for a long time. This is the place that we call home."

Laura Perrotta, the president and chief executive of the American Highway Users Alliance, a lobbying group that represents automotive companies and roadway users, said that states should have broad control over how the federal funds are spent.

Adding capacity on highways could be beneficial for local economies, she said, especially as some states experience population growth. Reducing congestion and widening lanes could also improve safety for drivers, Ms. Perrotta said.

“I don’t think you can just lock down and say we’re not going to expand anywhere because of the ramifications,” Ms. Perrotta said. “I think you just need to have a balance.”

At a White House briefing last week, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said the country had a duty to reckon with past decisions that may have harmed communities of color.

He pointed to a provision in the infrastructure bill that would “reconnect” communities of color to economic opportunity as one potential solution to racial disparities. That program, which Mr. Coes said could take the form of developing new public transportation systems, bicycle lanes or even dismantling highways, was shaved down to \$1 billion from the \$20 billion originally proposed, although there is additional funding that is still pending in a domestic policy bill that Democrats hope to pass soon.

Transportation experts have argued another solution is to focus infrastructure spending on addressing a growing backlog of projects in need of repair rather than expanding freeways that historically separated Black and white neighborhoods. While a portion of the funds issued directly to states must address safety and repairs, experts say it is just a fraction of what is needed to address what the American Society of Civil Engineers estimates to be a \$786 billion backlog for road and bridge repairs.

Representative Peter A. DeFazio of Oregon, a Democrat and the chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, originally pushed to include language in the bill that would make it more challenging for states to use the federal funds on highway expansion. Although he said he would have preferred a “hard and fast requirement” to prioritize road repair, states would have to answer to the public if their projects did not advance equity and environmental justice.

“I think they might be held accountable by their own citizens,” Mr. DeFazio said.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Pandemic tragedies meatpacking industry
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/16/meatpacking-industry-covid-outbreaks-workers
GIST	<p>Companies and regulators have been accused of treating workers as cogs in a machine that feeds America’s meat obsession. Covid-19 only exposed the human cost</p> <p>Early in the pandemic, Covid outbreaks were rampant in America’s meatpacking plants – the factories that kill, cut and package animals.</p> <p>But the chairman of one of America’s biggest meat companies, Tyson, argued that these factories should stay open to feed Americans.</p> <p>“It is as essential as healthcare,” John Tyson wrote in several newspaper ads. Days later President Donald Trump issued an executive order to keep meat plants running.</p> <p>The following month, 49 meatpacking workers died of Covid.</p> <p>The message was clear: Americans needed meat, and workers needed to risk their lives to provide it. And Osha – the labor department agency that is supposed to protect workers – could seemingly do little to protect them.</p>

In a factory in Greeley, Colorado, owned by meat conglomerate JBS, [at least six workers](#) died early in the pandemic. Osha is [supposed](#) to investigate every workplace fatality reported to them, but it took months for them to send an investigator.

When Osha finally showed up to investigate, it found JBS failed to make their workplace free of “hazards that were causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm”. The penalty: a proposed fine of \$13,494.

That’s about how much revenue JBS [earns](#) in 60 seconds.

Meatpacking workers tried to tell Osha about their concerns. In the first weeks of the pandemic, dozens of them officially complained to Osha. They said management was forcing people with Covid symptoms to continue coming to work; that social distancing guidelines weren’t enforced; and that they had inadequate protective equipment.

In the first four months of the pandemic, Osha received **a huge spike in complaints** from meatpacking workers.

These complaints were canaries in the coal mine.

The following few months, **nearly 200 meatpacking workers died** of Covid.

By September 8 this year, Covid would kill at least 298 meat plant workers.

Despite the spike in complaints, Osha conducted **just 30 inspections** of meatpacking plants in the first four months of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, meatpacking executives privately believed that outbreaks were unavoidable, documents revealed by ProPublica have shown. “Social distancing is a nicety that makes sense only for people with laptops,” [wrote Smithfield CEO Kenneth Sullivan](#). A Tyson official blamed outbreaks on the workers’ crowded living and commuting arrangements: “This is a culture issue.”

In a way the companies were right: it was unavoidable – partly because, for decades, the meatpacking industry had worked to take bargaining power away from workers to create an industry that has been criticized for treating them as [disposable](#) parts of an assembly line.

“What Covid did was just really shed light on what workers dealt with anyway,” said Kim Cordova, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7 which represents workers at the Greeley JBS plant. “Osha just failed. They did absolutely nothing to help workers during the worst pandemic we’ve seen in our lifetime.”

Representative Jim Clyburn, who heads a congressional investigation into the coronavirus, [wrote](#), “[Osha] failed to adequately carry out its responsibility for enforcing worker safety laws at meatpacking plants across the country, resulting in preventable infections and deaths.”

In a statement, Osha said it was committed to worker safety and added that, as President Joe Biden had [ordered](#), it was “continuing to review” its response to Covid to any changes that could better protect workers. It said Clyburn’s letter and requests referred to actions under the Trump administration.

The failures weren’t limited to factories. The 500,000 people working in meatpacking inevitably came in contact with people in their community and spread the virus. Researchers [found](#) that by July 2020, areas nearby meatpacking plants had far more Covid cases and deaths than expected: about 5,000 additional Covid deaths and about a quarter million additional cases.

Put another way, meatpacking plants were connected to 6% to 8% of all early-pandemic Covid cases and 3% to 4% of all early-pandemic Covid deaths. “This needs to go down in the history books as one of the biggest failures to the working man or woman that this country’s ever seen,” Cordova said.

A history of injuries and blazing line speeds

The modern meatpacking industry runs on human workers repeating the same motion, over and over, regardless of how much their bodies tell them to stop.

Each year, American meatpacking workers kill, cut and package about 9.3 billion chickens, 34 million cows and 130 million pigs. The [numbers](#) are too big to imagine. But in order to process that much meat, the USDA allows poultry companies to push 140 birds per minute through their lines – a number that was [increased to 175](#) during the pandemic. That means some workers perform up to 24,000 knife cuts and lift 15 tons of meat each day, according to research [estimates](#).

When Osha collected data on repetitive stress injuries, meatpacking companies consistently reported the highest rates of any industry. But in 2001, the agency [stopped collecting](#) such detailed data, [removing the column](#) that classified injuries as musculoskeletal disorders.

Osha said that repetitive stress injuries are still reported in Osha logs, but a [2016 GAO report](#) found that that information is in a separate incident report that is generally not sent to Osha or the Bureau of Labor Statistics, making it difficult to gather and track. Osha also said the Bureau of Labor Statistics collects data on repetitive stress injuries; however that data is an estimate calculated from random surveying of employers.

“I’ve had problems with my arm I used to cut because the line was too fast. I’ve had shoulder pain and I cut my finger badly because the production line comes too fast,” said one pork plant worker in Nebraska. “My wife, who works at the plant, almost cut her finger completely off with a saw because she doesn’t have enough time to cut the meat. I’ve seen a lot of people cut their arms, hands, and hurt their shoulders because they’re working too fast. About 1 in 10 workers are on light duty because of injuries.”

In 1999, the Clinton administration issued an [ergonomics rule](#) that aimed to protect workers from these repetitive stress injuries. “It was 30 years in the making – 30 years of research to really build a really good standard to protect workers,” said Darcy Tromanhauser, the program director for the Immigrant and Communities program at the non-profit advocacy organization Nebraska Appleseed.

But a year later, Republicans rescinded the rule.

Meanwhile, managers keep workers on the lines. That can mean that many factories don’t allow workers to take bathroom breaks. A Southern Poverty Law Center survey found that nearly [80% of workers](#) said they can’t use the bathroom when needed. Another survey in Minnesota found that [86% of workers](#) said they get two or fewer bathroom breaks a week.

“It’s very common to hear from workers that they soil themselves,” said Axel Fuentes, the executive director of Rural Community Workers Alliance in Missouri. “They usually make them go in their pants or defecate on the line because they couldn’t get bathroom breaks.”

During the pandemic, keeping workers on the line meant forcing people with Covid to come to work, according to worker complaints to Osha.

Serious and traumatic injuries are also common. In 2015, Osha began requiring employers to report serious injuries promptly after the incident. This involves any injury that requires in-patient hospitalization, amputation of a body part, or loss of an employee’s eye. (Only the states under federal jurisdiction have to report.) And year after year, meatpacking workers are among the most likely to suffer an injury where a body part is amputated. About half of the injuries involve workers losing fingers.

In February, Hussain Ahmed Jalal, an immigrant from Myanmar, was working at the JBS plant in Greeley at 12.40am – after most other workers had gone home.

“As I threw the meat on the conveyor, I accidentally got caught in the conveyor motor with my gloves and my left hand was stuck in the conveyor,” Ahmed Jalal said. “I called for somebody to help me and stop the motor and conveyor, but no one was around. Nobody saw the conveyor. I fell down and waited about an hour until the fire department finally came.”

The accident amputated his entire left hand.

Since the accident, he’s gone through three different surgeries and is currently receiving workers’ compensation. He’s worked at the factory since 2011, but he’s unsure when or if he will be able to return to work. Osha investigated the accident several months later and issued five safety penalties, according to Osha citations obtained by the Guardian.

The proposed penalty: \$174,566.

JBS did not comment on Jalal’s injury or the related OSHA proposed penalties. In a statement the firm said worker safety was its priority and, when asked about its pandemic response, said: “We strongly disagree with any claim that suggests we have not prioritized the safety of our workforce at all times throughout the pandemic.”

All of the top meat producing firms have defended their safety records and handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Tyson has also said safety is its “top priority” and since October 1 has [required US employees](#) to have Covid-19 vaccinations. Smithfield Foods has said it has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to protect employees.

The shift to an immigrant workforce

The precarious work conditions in meatpacking – and lack of labor protections – were decades in the making, and often engineered to be this way.

When Osha was created in 1971, lawmakers assumed labor unions would play a large part in keeping companies in check. In addition, competition in the job market would allow workers to move to another company with safer labor practices, especially since meatpacking plants were clustered in dense urban areas.

But a handful of meatpacking companies had an idea of how to increase their power and maximize profits.

They first started moving meatpacking plants away from large cities and into rural areas where they would typically be the primary economic driver in the region. This gave them immense political power that still lives on to this day. For example, in Greeley, JBS employs nearly 4,600 workers, which accounts for about [10% of working adults](#).

“These companies are so powerful that they run certain states like Iowa, Arkansas and North Carolina where the governors can’t do anything without their support,” said Debbie Berkowitz, former Osha chief of staff who’s been involved in worker safety at meat and poultry processing plants for more than 40 years. “This means that workers don’t get protected. The power of the industry is enormously frightening.”

And those new powerhouses – Cargill, JBS, Tyson and National – started buying up smaller companies. These companies kept on pointing to their decreasing injury stats to show that their workplaces were getting safer.

But Berkowitz said, “Nothing had changed except that the industry became enormously consolidated, lots of small companies were gobbled up by the big players – JBS, Smithfield, Tyson, Cargill.”

Those four companies now control 85% of the beef market and 70% of the pork market.

In addition to the geographic restructuring, these companies started to [recruit a workforce](#) that had less organizing power.

Meatpacking used to be dominated by native-born white and Black workers. But starting in the 1980s, the industry started to rely more and more on immigrant labor. In 1990, only about 18% of meatpacking workers were Hispanic. Just 10 years later in 2000, about 42% were Hispanic.

This coincided with the conservative attack on labor unions and the subsequent demise of an organized workforce.

In 1952, about 90% of meatpacking workers were [covered under union](#) contracts. By 1983, union membership had plummeted to 33% and by 2020 it was just 18%.

Meatpacking was once a middle-class job for citizens, with the average production worker in 1974 earning more than \$25 an hour in 2021 dollars. But the active recruitment of workers with less organizing power allowed these wages to plummet.

During the Great Recession in 2008, wages fell to about \$16 an hour. Now it's about \$19 an hour. But that's the average; many meatpacking workers are paid far less. About 1 in 5 meatpacking workers are food stamp recipients, double the amount from 20 years ago.

As historian Wilson J Warren [writes](#), the US meat industry transformed “from a relatively safe, well-paying industry employing primarily native-born white and Black people into an increasingly dangerous, low-paying industry employing a large number of immigrants”.

And the ultimate goal for all of this was to improve the bottom line.

While consumers have been paying more for meat and the farmers who raise these animals have been paid less, these meatpacking giants have profited. In 2017, the top four meatpacking companies had a combined annual revenue of \$207bn.

This year, the biggest of those companies, Cargill, brought in [record profits](#), making \$4.3bn in the first nine months of this fiscal year.

Underreported data masks severity of the problem

For decades, there have been reports of meatpacking companies urging their workers to not report injuries.

In the late-1980s, Osha found dozens of [underreported injuries](#) in large plants in Nebraska. Workers who were sick or hurt were pushed to keep working, or risk losing their jobs. The US Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) found similar practices [in an investigation](#) a few years ago, including one doctor who said injured meatpacking workers asked for medical permission to work “because their employer had threatened to fire them if they could not do their jobs”.

“I never stopped working because they never cared about my injury,” said a worker at a pork processing plant in Milan, Missouri, who injured their finger in April while cleaning a platform on the processing line due to high speed work rates. “All they did was to give me a Band-Aid and my supervisor said that was just to prevent water from getting into the wound. My fingernail is completely off and I’m still in pain.”

In the past, the labor department used to collect data on repetitive trauma injuries. But in the early 2000s, Osha [stopped requiring employers](#) to collect this data separately, which made it look like overall workplace injuries were plummeting – something industry groups would boast about year after year.

But even when Osha collected that data, it may have been a severe undercount. When the Southern Poverty Law Center surveyed hundreds of meatpacking workers in Alabama, they found that 66% of

respondents said they suffered from symptoms of these repetitive motion injuries, like chronic pain, swelling and numbness.

“The industry is much more dangerous now than in the 1990s, and the biggest factors are consolidation and cutting corners of worker safety,” said Berkowitz, the former Osha chief of staff.

Notably, Osha only collects comprehensive data from the 29 states that are under its jurisdiction. All other states police themselves.

Meanwhile the number of OSHA inspectors is at the [lowest number](#) since the early 1970s, after the Trump administration [slashed](#) Osha resources.

There are only 1,815 inspectors (752 federal and 1,063 state) to inspect the 9.8m workplaces under Osha’s jurisdiction. Under current federal Osha staffing, the agency is only able to inspect workplaces under its jurisdiction once every 165 years on average.

Osha even [struggled to count](#) the number of meatpacking Covid deaths, according to a report by the House select subcommittee on the coronavirus crisis.

Osha [reported](#) 92 deaths in 2020. But one Osha official [told the subcommittee](#) that they relied in part on data from the [Food and Environment Reporting Network](#), a nonprofit news organization, which counted more than 260 deaths in 2020.

‘These workers were sacrificial’

About one month after Hussain Ahmed Jalal lost his hand in an accident this year, another accident happened at the Greeley JBS plant.

Jonathan Bryan Duerst, a 55-year-old worker, was knocked over by a piece of equipment and [fell](#) into a vat of chemicals used to process animal hides. Duerst died.

Osha investigated and found eight serious violations in regards to his death. The result: a [proposed](#) fine of \$58,709.

On one hand, Congress is investigating the industry for the hundreds of Covid deaths. In February, the House select subcommittee on the coronavirus crisis opened an investigation into JBS USA, Smithfield Foods and Tyson Foods for refusing to take basic precautions to protect their workers – [“a callous disregard for worker’s health,”](#) the committee said – [Cargill](#) and [National Beef Packing company](#) (National Beef) were added to its ongoing investigation.

But America has long turned a blind eye to an industry that allows a half million workers to work in dangerous conditions, all in an effort to fill the country’s huge demand for meat. And government regulators have been unable to protect them. If anything, Covid made it loud and clear “that these workers were sacrificial and, by all means necessary, they have to keep production going,” said Cordova, the Greeley union president.

Last year, the average American consumed about [225 pounds](#) of meat.

“When people buy any meat product they have to be thinking about how their food gets to the table,” said the pork plant worker in Nebraska. “We get it there. And we make many sacrifices to get it there.”

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HEADLINE	11/16 School bus drivers’ wave of labor unrest
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/nov/16/school-bus-drivers-protest-shortages-pay-covid
GIST	Yellow school buses are part of the American streetscape, familiar to families across the US and an easily recognizable symbol the world over.

But the drivers of the vehicles that shuttle America's children to and from school are now caught up in the wave of labor unrest sweeping across the US in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Strikes, walkouts, protests or sick-outs among school bus drivers have taken place this fall in many states including [North Carolina](#), [New Mexico](#), [Maryland](#), [Florida](#), [Indiana](#), [Georgia](#) [Pennsylvania](#) and [New York](#) among others.

Some school districts have [periodically closed](#) schools due to bus driver shortages or [changed](#) school schedules to accommodate the shortage. Other districts have [raised pay](#) and offered [sign-on bonuses](#) to try to lure workers into vacant school bus driver positions.

Nichole Marshall, a school bus driver in Bullitt county, Kentucky, is one of several drivers to have participated in [protests and sick-outs](#) over the past few weeks for pay raises amid driver shortages in the county. They are also advocating for drivers to be provided with any paid sick time they used to quarantine due to exposure or testing positive for Covid-19.

Marshall explained that school bus drivers are driving buses packed with up to 70 students at once, often having to work multiple routes during a shift as routes were [cancelled](#) and consolidated due to the shortages.

"A lot of us have been doing double runs and they're making it permanent," said Marshall.

Her school district has [offered](#) bus drivers a \$50-a-week stipend incentive, which Marshall argued does not make up for the low salaries drivers make, around \$19,000 a year, in addition to the stipulations of attendance or having to work extra routes in order to receive the stipend. Drivers are also [expected](#) to pay for their own commercial driver's license, background check and maintain a clean driving record.

"We've been begging for better pay. All the counties around us are getting better pay at this point," added Marshall.

When Covid-19 shutdowns hit the US in March 2020, school bus drivers either quit, were [furloughed](#), laid off, retired or [got sick](#) as schools transitioned to online learning.

Though a shortage of school bus drivers was an issue before the pandemic, the problem has worsened in the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year and several school districts around the US are having trouble finding enough drivers.

According to a [survey](#) published in August 2021 by the National Association for Pupil Transportation, 51% of school district respondents reported their driver shortages as "severe" or "desperate". Every region in the US has altered student transportation services as a result of Covid-19. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents said their driver shortages were worsening.

In Wake county, North Carolina, school bus drivers have been [calling out sick en masse](#) over the past few weeks, demanding higher wages amid driver shortages throughout the district.

"What's behind the sick-outs is our frustration with various administrations for their sluggishness in getting fair wages to the working class," said Zac Campbell, a school bus driver in the district since 2019.

He started at \$13.25 an hour, which was raised to \$15 an hour, but Campbell lived 30 minutes away from work and spent time between morning and afternoon shifts sitting in his car, with no working heater. He noted that the low wages are part of the state's [failure](#) to fully fund public education in budget negotiations.

“I felt utterly hopeless,” added Campbell. “After working through the lockdowns, delivering technology and lunches and doing basic maintenance in the summer heat, I’m still getting paid just \$15 an hour. Considering inflation and the price of gas, it’s not a livable wage.”

Tae Weldon, another school bus driver in the same county, argued drivers are not properly compensated for the license, training and background checks they have to regularly keep up-to-date out of their own pocket.

“The license we possess is worth way more than what they are paying us,” said Weldon. “The school system never asks the drivers’ opinions on how they feel about things going on around the workplace.”

“The problem is not a bus driver shortage, the problem is a bus driver salary shortage. If the salaries reflected the duties of a bus driver, there would be no shortages,” said Chonta Henderson, a school bus driver in Seminole county, Florida, where drivers have threatened to [call a sick-out](#) for better wages. “We can’t continue to work as a bus driver and still have to work other jobs to make ends meet. We need to be paid what we are worth.”

Chardo Richardson, the executive director of the Seminole County School Bus Drivers’ Association, emphasized the shortage of bus drivers facing the county is a result of the low wages drivers receive for the work they do.

School bus drivers work split shifts, in the morning and afternoon, around the school schedule which can start as early as 4.30am. They are responsible for supervising dozens of children while driving, exposing themselves to Covid-19. Many bus drivers are frustrated due to shortages, Covid-19 challenges and low pay.

“I think the best way to resolve the bus driver shortage and to really improve the community and transportation that we offer to our children is to definitely raise the wages of our drivers across the nation, across the state and, especially here in Seminole county. Raising the wages will keep those folks that we need here,” said Richardson.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Nigeria forces fired on unarmed protesters?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/16/nigeria-end-sars-panel-report-massacre/
GIST	<p>DAKAR, Senegal — Nigerian security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters in the nation’s largest city in October 2020, killing at least 15 and wounding dozens in what investigators called a “massacre,” according to a leaked report Tuesday.</p> <p>The Lagos State judicial panel charged with interviewing witnesses and studying footage of the incident has determined that soldiers and police officers — who denied shooting live rounds — sprayed bullets into a peaceful crowd, according to two panel members.</p> <p>The report offers the first official death toll from the violence. Previously, an investigation by Amnesty International found that at least 12 people died near a toll gate in the upscale suburb of Lekki.</p> <p>The authors presented their findings to the state government Monday, said the panel members, who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. The 309-page document has yet to be officially published.</p> <p>The Nigerian military and police did not immediately respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>Word of the killings sparked international outrage last year as photos of bloodied protesters — some holding the Nigerian flag — flooded social media. Confusion abounded after security forces declared they had discharged only blanks meant to bruise and scare those breaking a curfew.</p>

Nigeria's information minister [backed those claims](#), calling what transpired a "massacre without blood or bodies."

Tens of thousands of demonstrators had been marching in cities across Africa's most populous country for weeks against police brutality. They sought the end of [a notorious unit](#) called the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which was widely known for abuses of power. The grass-roots movement went viral globally. Megastars including Beyoncé and Rihanna shared the hashtag: #EndSARS.

"We need justice, not just reports," said Rinu Odua, an #EndSARS activist who worked with the panel. "The people who allowed this to happen are not ghosts or figments of our imaginations. They are real and should be made to face the law immediately."

Before the massacre, hundreds of protesters had camped out near the Lekki toll gate, blasting music and sharing meals. Video captured people dancing, chanting and waving Nigerian flags. The gathering convened in the days after the president [abolished the SARS unit](#), and protesters said they would not stop until they saw meaningful reform of the nation's law enforcement.

The mood soured when soldiers arrived just before sundown. Some demonstrators sat cross-legged in quiet defiance, according to live streams from the evening. Then chaos broke out.

"The atrocious maiming and killing of unarmed, helpless and unresisting protesters, while sitting on the floor and waving their Nigerian flags, while singing the national anthem can be equated to a 'massacre' in context," the report said.

At least 15 people died or went missing, the report said, with the missing presumed dead. Witnesses told investigators that the military had collected bodies at the scene in what the report described as a "coverup."

Members of the Nigeria Police Force, who arrived shortly after the soldiers, also fired at people dashing away, the panel found. Investigators recovered shell casings of bullets used by both officers and soldiers on the streets.

Doctors at nearby hospitals confirmed treating dozens of people that night for military-grade bullet wounds. The report listed 33 victims with injuries.

Days later, as shock and fury swept Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari gave an emergency address — but made no mention of what happened in Lekki. Instead, he urged protesters to stand down.

"Constructively engage the government in finding solutions," he said. "Your voice has been heard loud and clear, and we are responding."

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HEADLINE	11/16 NKorea leader public appearance
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/16/kim-jong-un-public-appearance-samjiyon/
GIST	<p>North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has made his first public appearance in more than a month, visiting a new state-developed alpine city billed a "model" socialist "utopia," as he looks to cement his legacy during a period of widespread food shortages.</p> <p>The visit to the northern city of Samjiyon, reported in state media Tuesday, comes as Kim approaches his 10th anniversary as leader of a country that has been cut off from the rest of the world since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. With its ski slopes, commercial and medical facilities and homes for thousands of families, the city — near the border with China — projects a very different image than that of a nation gripped by extreme poverty.</p>

Samjiyon is a major economic project developed by Pyongyang to support the notion that North Korea is thriving in spite of international sanctions over its nuclear program, experts said. The regime's official Korean Central News Agency reported Tuesday that Kim said the city's buildings reflect the "lofty loyalty, strong will and sweat of our people" and the "iron will" of North Korea to "achieve prosperity our own way."

The city is near Mount Paektu, a mountain that has a central place in North Korean's founding lore and from which the Kim family purports to trace its roots. Its completion had been set for the 75th anniversary of the founding of the country's ruling Workers' Party last year, but construction was slowed by the pandemic.

Kim's visit was timed to mark the final phase of construction, set to wrap up by the end of this year. "This is all about cementing Kim Jong Un's legacy as he approaches his 10-year anniversary," said Jean H. Lee, a Korea expert at the Wilson Center. "Kim wants to reinforce the mythology that he is fulfilling a divine mandate to rule."

Developments such as Samjiyon are particularly significant to his legacy now, she added, as North Korea is undergoing severe extreme economic hardship following nearly two years of pandemic-led border closures that stopped the flow of most goods and food into the country.

North Korea has been [breeding black swans](#), which state media has encouraged people to eat amid scarcity of other foods, according to NK News, a website that monitors the regime.

Kim became leader following the death of his father in December 2011 and has spent years removing rivals and developing defense capabilities, including nuclear weapons and missiles. He says the weapons are needed to bolster the regime in the face of South Korea and the United States.

"The reality is that not enough resources are being poured into infrastructure in North Korea. They are being poured into building nuclear weapons," Lee said. "The little that is devoted to infrastructure is strategically focused on projects that serve the purpose of supporting the Kim mythology and propaganda" while many other towns and cities across the country languish.

At his last public appearance in mid-October, he [showcased North Korea's latest nuclear and other weaponry](#), including a version of a "hypersonic" weapon. Analysts have expressed doubts over that weapon's capabilities.

The dictator had not been seen in public for 35 days — reportedly the longest such absence since 2014 — but Lee said the extended period was not particularly significant given the time of the year. Kim's occasional departures from the public eye have long stirred debate over his health.

Kim also toured agricultural areas around the city, which he described as "a picturesque model unit in rural buildup," according to state media. He also called for more scientific research into potato production in "unfavorable" alpine conditions.

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HEADLINE	11/16 US-China summit: polite; no breakthroughs
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/world/asia/biden-xi-usa-china.html
GIST	<p>The virtual meeting between President Biden and China's leader, Xi Jinping, produced no breakthroughs in a relationship that has spiraled dangerously downward. That was not the intent.</p> <p>Instead, the two leaders sought to keep the many disputes between the two countries from escalating into a broader conflict. If they can translate their words into a kind of détente, it would count as a diplomatic success.</p>

“It seems clear to me we need to establish some common-sense guardrails,” Mr. Biden told Mr. Xi in opening remarks, speaking over what amounted to the equivalent of a Zoom call from the Roosevelt Room at the White House and the East Hall in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Mr. Xi, for his part, called Mr. Biden “my old friend” and used a nautical metaphor, comparing the two countries to ships that must together navigate the ocean’s wind and waves without colliding.

Bubbling under the surface, though, was acrimony that could prove difficult to resolve.

At the end of three and a half hours of [talks](#), the two did not even cobble together the sort of joint statement that has typically punctuated summits between the United States and China over the decades. Mr. Xi’s last meeting with an American president, Donald J. Trump in 2019, also ended with no joint statement, marking the deterioration in ties.

Nor did the meeting end with [any agreement](#) to have groups of officials from both sides hold further talks on strategic nuclear issues and conflicts in cyberspace — the way Mr. Biden did in his summit last June with another quarrelsome geopolitical rival, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

“We were not expecting a breakthrough,” a senior administration official told reporters shortly after the talks with Mr. Xi ended. “There were none.”

Instead, the two sides issued their own statements, each emphasizing the points of longstanding contention. They amounted to catalogs of mutual grievances that offered little room for compromise.

Mr. Biden raised concerns about human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, and about China’s “unfair trade and economic policies” harming American workers, the White House statement said. Mr. Xi, according to China’s own readout, said that American support for Taiwan was “playing with fire,” and explicitly warned that the world risked slipping back into the superpower confrontations of a half-century ago.

“Engaging in ideological demarcation, camp division, group confrontation, will inevitably bring disaster to the world,” Mr. Xi said, a clear reference to a pillar of the new administration’s strategy for challenging China by teaming up with like-minded nations that fear China or oppose its authoritarian model. “The consequence of the Cold War are not far away.”

With that reference, Mr. Xi plunged directly into the debate now underway in Washington about whether the two powers are descending into something akin to the [Cold War](#), or whether the deep economic, trade and technological links between China and the U.S. make any comparison to the old United States-Soviet Union relationship impossible.

The tone of the meeting was a reminder that China, perhaps inevitably, remains what Mr. Biden and his top advisers have cast as the greatest geopolitical challenge to the United States in its history. They have rejected the Cold War comparisons as overly simplistic, and as Mr. Biden’s national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, put it, “We have the choice not to do that.”

“China is going to be a factor in the international system for the foreseeable future — it’s not going anywhere,” Mr. Sullivan said last week during a speech to the Lowy Institute in Australia. “And the United States is not going anywhere, and we’re not going anywhere in the Indo-Pacific either. And so we’re going to have to learn how to deal with that reality.”

Although the two leaders have spoken by telephone twice this year, the conference was intended to replicate the more thorough discussion of issues in previous summits between the United States and China — something that has not been possible because [pandemic and political preoccupations](#) have kept Mr. Xi from traveling since January 2020.

The White House had hoped to hold the meeting in person, possibly at the Group of 20 meeting in Rome last month, but concluded that it was better to meet remotely than to let tensions fester into next year. Mr. Xi is sure to be preoccupied then with the Winter Olympics in Beijing in February and [a Communist Party congress](#) in November that is expected to extend his rule.

Mr. Biden has repeatedly suggested that it should be possible for the United States to engage in vigorous competition with China and to confront it over certain issues, without risking clashes — whether in the disputed waters off China’s coast or in the murky shadows of cyberspace.

He also wanted to hold the meeting after he had begun to shore up American competitiveness at home. Just hours before meeting Mr. Xi, he signed the bipartisan infrastructure bill, which his aides cited as an example of refocusing on international competitiveness. He also recently signed other legislation that bans some key Chinese technology players, like the telecommunications giant Huawei, from operating inside the United States.

What is perceived as a move to strengthen the economy in one capital can seem aggressive in the other. “Both leaders are dissatisfied with the state of the relationship and the behavior of the other country,” said Danny Russel, a former assistant secretary of state who participated in talks with Mr. Xi during the Obama administration. “Both are also mindful of the risk of an incident between our militaries that could quickly spin out of control.”

No one meeting could have resolved the enormous divisions that have grown between the two countries.

The trade war that Mr. Trump started remains unresolved, with China still more than \$180 billion short of a pledge to purchase \$380 billion in American products before a deadline of Dec. 31. Problems have also emerged or gotten worse, including a Pentagon assessment that China is [rapidly expanding its strategic nuclear arsenal](#), and may be abandoning its decades-long strategy of maintaining a “minimum deterrent.”

Administration officials declined to discuss what was said about the nuclear buildup, beyond a vague statement that Mr. Biden “underscored the importance of managing strategic risks.”

Other topics that analysts thought would come up did not, according to the senior administration official. They included disputes over granting visas for diplomats, journalists and others, as well as a possible invitation to attend the Winter Olympics in Beijing in February.

Many also expected an effort to create a forum for discussing disputes, like those established by Presidents Bush and Obama. The two sides did agree to talks among lower-level officials. That, and the leaders’ tone in their published statements, raised hopes that tensions could ease at least a bit.

“All the right things were said by both sides to stabilize a relationship marked by mutual mistrust,” said Rorry Daniels, a security specialist with the National Committee on American Foreign Policy in Washington. “The question moving forward is how each side will adjust policy to meet this change of direction.”

After Mr. Biden’s last telephone call with the Chinese leader in September, the tone of the relationship, at least, improved considerably.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and his counterpart, Wang Yi, met on the sidelines of the Group of 20 gathering and spoke by phone again last weekend. Mr. Biden’s envoy on climate change, John Kerry, and Mr. Xi’s, Xie Zhenhua, reached a [surprise agreement](#) on the issue at the talks this month in Glasgow.

Mr. Xi, according to the Chinese description of the talks, suggested that cooperation on issues like climate change was conditional on stability across the spectrum of the relationship — a stance at odds with Mr. Biden’s view.

	<p>“China and the United States are entering a period of détente, but we don’t know how long it will be and to what extent,” said Cheng Xiaohe, an associate professor of international studies at Renmin University in Beijing. “We have a lot of uncertainties now.”</p> <p>Even as the two leaders met virtually, another meeting was taking place in Beijing, commemorating the American pilots known as the Flying Tigers who aided China during its war against Japan in 1941 and 1942.</p> <p>“The story of the Flying Tigers undergirds the profound friendship forged by the lives and blood of the Chinese and American people,” Qin Gang, China’s ambassador to the United States, said during the event. Acknowledging the tensions in the relationship, he added that the two countries “should inherit the friendly friendship tempered by war.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Vaccinated: New Year’s Eve Times Square
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/16/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates#times-square-covid-new-years
GIST	<p>New York City will welcome crowds back to Times Square this New Year’s Eve, Mayor Bill de Blasio said Tuesday, as long as they provide proof that they are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus. After a pared-down celebration last year, the longtime tradition of the ball drop at midnight will return to the city “at full strength,” he said.</p> <p>“We want to welcome all those hundreds of thousands of folks, but everyone needs to be vaccinated,” Mr. de Blasio said during a news conference. “Join the crowd, join the joy, join a historic moment as New York City provides further evidence to the world that we are 100 percent back.”</p> <p>Attendees who are unable to provide proof of vaccination because of a disability will have to show that they received a negative coronavirus test within 72 hours of the event, and children younger than 5 will have to be accompanied by someone with proof of vaccination. Vaccines are available in the United States to those ages 5 and older. Masks will be required for those who are unable to get vaccinated, said Tom Harris, the president of the Times Square Alliance.</p> <p>The plans are being announced with enough lead time for people to get fully vaccinated, Mr. de Blasio said. In response to questions about why vaccination would be required for the ball drop when it is not required at other outdoor activities in the city, such as outdoor dining and concerts, Mr. de Blasio said a crowded, hourslong event drawing people from around the world required greater precaution.</p> <p>“When you’re outdoors with a few hundred thousand people packed close together for hours on end, it’s a different reality,” Mr. de Blasio said. “You’re talking about a lot of people really close for long periods of time. It makes sense to protect everyone.”</p> <p>The announcement comes as Mr. de Blasio is preparing for his successor, Eric Adams, to take over as the next mayor of New York City, and the ball drop will coincide with Mr. de Blasio’s final day in office. That will leave any fallout from the event in the hands of Mr. Adams, who will be inaugurated on Jan. 1, 2022.</p> <p>Several public health experts have warned that with the constantly changing nature of the coronavirus, it is difficult to predict where the city might be in terms of cases by the end of the year.</p> <p>“It’s not going to be perfect,” said Denis Nash, a professor of epidemiology for the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy. “We have to assume there will be people with Covid mixing among the revelers outdoors.”</p>

Nor is the risk limited to Times Square. Attendees will also have to consider what happens on the way to the ball drop, with people going in and out of nearby bars and restaurants to eat, get warm and use the restroom.

And with some major restrictions against international travelers recently eased by the United States, the ball drop is likely to attract partygoers from around the country and the world, drawing together people from areas of both lower and higher rates of the virus.

Danielle Ompad, an associate professor of epidemiology at New York University, said she would still urge attendees to exercise caution when deciding whether or not to go.

"I understand that people are so over this pandemic, and people are getting vaccinated and our vaccination rates are high," Ms. Ompad said. "But I still think it is important to be cautious."

Wafaa El-Sadr, an epidemiology professor at Columbia University, expressed similar concerns: "I would say, 'I'll wait for another year and choose to watch it from home.'"

Other major cities around the world have nixed their New Year's Eve celebrations. In October, London's mayor said that the city's end-of-year fireworks display would be canceled and replaced with a different kind of celebration, while Amsterdam canceled its celebrations this week in response to [a surge in cases](#).

Munich has also canceled its celebrated Christmas market, which was set to be held from next Monday through Christmas Eve. "The dramatic situation in our hospitals and the exponentially increasing infection figures leave me no other choice," the city's mayor, Dieter Reiter, told reporters on Tuesday.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Study: no matter age, 2 shots don't last
SOURCE	https://www.ipost.com/health-and-wellness/coronavirus/no-matter-how-old-you-are-two-shots-of-pfizer-vaccine-dont-last-study-685141
GIST	<p>People vaccinated with two shots of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine in January and February had a 51% increased chance of contracting the virus in July compared to those who were vaccinated in March or April, a new Israeli study published in Nature Communications has shown.</p> <p>The team of researchers from KI Institute worked with doctors from KSM Research and Innovation and used data provided by Maccabi Health Services to conduct a retrospective cohort study comparing the incidence rates of breakthrough infections and COVID-19-related hospitalizations between people vaccinated toward the beginning of the country's campaign (January and February) and those vaccinated toward the later stages (March and April). The study included more than 1.3 million records.</p> <p>As noted, the risk of infection was significantly higher for people the earlier they were vaccinated, with an additional trend for high risk of hospitalization. The results, the researchers said, are consistent with other studies on the subject that show a decline in antibody levels and immune system compounds after four to six months.</p> <p>Moreover, people's ages had no effect on the vaccine's waning, meaning that the vaccine waned for everyone and not just older people.</p> <p>"The vaccine's effectiveness wanes equally for everybody, according to the study," Dr. Barak Mizrahi, a researcher in computational health for KI Institute who led the study, said.</p> <p>Israel set a policy to administer a third shot to all individuals over the age of 12, in contrast to many other countries and the recommendation of the World Health Organization only to give the third jab to people at the highest risk of contracting the virus or developing serious disease.</p>

	<p>More than four million Israelis have taken a booster shot. The results were that the infection rate dropped significantly.</p> <p>Mizrahi explained that the vaccine waned more the further one got away from the original second dose, meaning that people vaccinated in January were more at risk of contracting corona than people vaccinated in February and so forth.</p> <p>The study was done as the Delta variant was burning across the country and many believed that the variant may be the cause of increased infection in Israel. Mizrahi said the study shows that the variant was likely less of a factor than assumed – though this is still not confirmed.</p> <p>Will the third dose last longer?</p> <p>Mizrahi said that it is difficult to tell at this stage. Very preliminary data has started to be collected in various studies that shows antibodies are waning after the third shot, too. However, he said that the level of antibodies is not the only factor when it comes to immunity. Officials will need to watch and see if infections start going up and then set vaccination policy accordingly, Mizrahi said.</p> <p>“I don’t think it will take us that long to know,” he concluded.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Potential storm disrupt Thanksgiving week?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/16/weather/thanksgiving-travel-weather-forecast-storm/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN) Thanksgiving is just over a week away, but holiday travel will start as early as Friday for some.</p> <p>A significant storm has the potential to disrupt travel plans from the Midwest to the Northeast during one of the busiest times of the year to travel. We are talking about disruptions at major airline hubs like Chicago and New York at the beginning of next week.</p> <p>"The upper trough and a possible embedded low may support potentially significant low pressure that would affect portions of the East, and requires monitoring given the busy Thanksgiving holiday travel week," the Weather Prediction Center (WPC) said Tuesday morning.</p> <p>The storm system could begin to develop Sunday in the Midwest, strengthening daily. By the time it gets near the East Coast on Tuesday, a secondary system could develop along the coast, exacerbating the disrupting weather conditions in places like New York.</p> <p>"It is too early to resolve detailed effects from low pressure that may be near the East Coast by next Tuesday, but significant rain/snow and strong winds could be possible," the WPC says.</p> <p>"Even though we are still almost a week out and forecasts can change, this looks like a planes, trains and automobiles storm," CNN meteorologist Chad Myers says.</p> <p>The only good news: Computer forecast models aren't always right. Especially a week in advance.</p> <p>There is a lot of uncertainty in the forecast Sunday night and thereafter, the National Weather Service in New York said Tuesday morning, so there is low confidence in the forecast.</p> <p>By Tuesday afternoon, the forecast models will have been rerun. The output Tuesday evening, Wednesday or Thursday could be different than it was earlier this morning.</p> <p>It is in the consistency and the trends from one model run to the next that meteorologists will be watching closely. This is what will build their confidence in next week's potential storm.</p>

	"Even as the storm moves away by Wednesday, airlines could still be dealing with significant prior cancellations with planes and crew members in the wrong place," Myers says. "This storm has really bad timing."
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HEADLINE	11/16 Consumers paying higher meat costs
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/consumers-paying-higher-meat-costs/
GIST	<p>Meatless Mondays could soon be followed by Tofu Tuesdays, at least among more frugal shoppers. Americans with an eye on the rising cost of groceries may want to curtail their purchases of animal protein, which have collectively notched double-digit price hikes over the past year.</p> <p>Since October of 2020, the price of meat, poultry and fish have all risen almost 12%, according to the government's Consumer Price Index. The price of beef has climbed even further, soaring more than 20% over the last year, while chicken has increased 7.5% and pork 14%, labor data show.</p> <p>Since early 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic, beef, pork and chicken prices are up roughly 26%, 19% and 15%, respectively, according to EconoFact, a nonpartisan publication that covers economic affairs.</p> <p>"The meat price increases were initially caused by disruptions in supply when packing plants shuttered after workers contracted COVID-19," Jayson Lusak, an agricultural economist at Purdue University, wrote in a post on EconoFact. "Packing has fully resumed, but there remain extra costs from socially distanced workers and the addition of personal protective equipment."</p> <p>Tyson Foods, which accounts for roughly 20% of U.S. meat production, is raising prices as it pays more for grain, labor, transportation, warehousing, packaging and ingredients, CEO Donnie King said in an earnings call on Monday. "It might be easier for me to tell you what component hasn't seen inflation this past year," he said.</p> <p>The company is protecting its bottom line and passing along higher costs to consumers, hiking prices 13% for the fiscal year and 24% in the fourth quarter, he said.</p> <p>Tyson's revenue rose 20% in the fourth quarter — mostly due to its price increases — while sales fell 4%, largely because of plants not being fully staffed, Stewart Glendinning, the company's chief financial officer, told Wall Street analysts.</p> <p>Americans buying Tyson beef saw prices jump an average of nearly 33% during the quarter. During that same period, prices for the company's pork and chicken surged 38% and 19%, respectively. That helped boost Tyson's revenue 12% to \$12.8 billion during the three-month period, and its earnings more than doubled to nearly \$1.4 billion from the year-ago quarter.</p> <p>Inflation isn't just showing up in the grocery aisle — Americans are also paying more for gasoline, heating oil, clothes, rent and many other items, with demand picking up even as labor shortages and other disruptions put a lid on supply.</p> <p>The situation is proving stressful this Thanksgiving for many Americans, who may not be able to afford the food for the meal-centric holiday or find everything on their grocery lists.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 New details China hypersonic weapons test
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-hypersonic-weapons-test-details-united-states-military/
GIST	In an exclusive interview with CBS News, General John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the No. 2 person in the U.S. military, revealed new details of last summer's Chinese hypersonic weapons test, which sent a missile around the world at more than five times the speed of sound.

"They launched a long-range missile," Hyten told CBS News. "It went around the world, dropped off a hypersonic glide vehicle that glided all the way back to China, that impacted a target in China." Asked if it hit the target, Hyten replied, "Close enough."

Unlike intercontinental ballistic missiles which travel in a predictable arc and can be tracked by long range radars, a hypersonic weapon maneuvers much closer to the earth, making it harder for radars to detect. Combined with hundreds of new missile silos China is building, Hyten believes the Chinese could one day have the capability to launch a surprise nuclear attack on the U.S.

"They look like a first-use weapon," Hyten said. "That's what those weapons look like to me."

For decades, the nuclear balance between the U.S. and Russia has depended on neither side having the capability to launch a successful first strike. If China is now trying to develop a first-strike capability, that balance would be in jeopardy.

The U.S. is developing its own hypersonic weapons — but not as quickly as China. Hyten told CBS News that in the last five years, China has carried out hundreds of hypersonic tests, while the U.S. has conducted just nine. China has already deployed one medium-range hypersonic weapon, while the U.S. is still a few years from fielding its first one, according to Hyten.

China's round-the-world hypersonic test took place on July 27 and has been compared to the moment in 1957 during the arms race with the Soviet Union when Moscow launched the Sputnik satellite, becoming the first nation into space and catching the U.S. by surprise.

Asked if he would compare the Chinese test to Sputnik, Hyten replied that "from a technology perspective, it's pretty impressive. . . But Sputnik created a sense of urgency in the United States. . . The test on July 27 did not create that sense of urgency. I think it probably should create a sense of urgency."

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HEADLINE	11/16 States sue: health worker vaccine mandate
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/2nd-group-states-challenges-health-worker-vaccine-mandate-81210123
GIST	<p>NEW ORLEANS -- A second set of states has filed a federal lawsuit challenging the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health care workers.</p> <p>The latest suit, dated Monday, was filed in Louisiana on behalf of 12 states and comes less than a week after another lawsuit challenging the rule was filed in Missouri by a coalition of 10 states.</p> <p>"The federal government will not impose medical tyranny on Louisiana's people without my best fight," Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry said in a news release announcing the lawsuit.</p> <p>Both lawsuits say the vaccine mandate threatens to drive away health care workers who refuse to get vaccinated at a time when such workers are badly needed. They also contend the rule issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services violates federal law and unconstitutionally encroaches on powers reserved to the states.</p> <p>The Louisiana lawsuit quotes from Friday's order by the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals blocking a broader Biden administration vaccine mandate that businesses with more than 100 workers require employees to be vaccinated by Jan. 4 or wear masks and be tested weekly for COVID-19.</p> <p>Borrowing language from the 5th Circuit, the Louisiana lawsuit calls the health care worker vaccine requirement a "one-size-fits-all" sledgehammer. In addition to Louisiana, the suit covers Montana, Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah and West Virginia.</p>

	<p>The Missouri suit includes Alaska, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming.</p> <p>The Biden administration has not yet filed responses in either of the suits.</p> <p>The Louisiana-based lawsuit was assigned to U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty, an appointee of President Donald Trump. Any appeals of a Doughty decision would go to the 5th Circuit.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 SKorea pushes booster shots amid surge
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/south-korea-pushes-booster-shots-covid-19-spread-81217495
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- South Korea on Wednesday reported 3,187 new cases of the coronavirus, nearly matching a one-day record set in September, a worrisome development in a country that eased social distancing rules in recent weeks to lessen the pandemic's economic impact.</p> <p>The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said more than 2,550 of the new cases came from the greater capital area, including a record 1,436 in Seoul. The country's death toll is now 3,137, after 21 deaths were reported on Wednesday, the 16th consecutive day of double-digit fatalities, including a record 32 on Saturday.</p> <p>The delta-driven spread has raised questions about whether the country was too quick to ease pandemic restrictions at the start of November in what officials described as a first step toward restoring some pre-pandemic normalcy.</p> <p>In allowing larger social gatherings and expanding indoor dining hours at restaurants, officials had hoped that the country's improving vaccination rates would keep hospitalizations and deaths down even if the virus continues to spread.</p> <p>But there has been a rise in serious cases and fatalities among senior citizens who rejected vaccines or people in long-term care settings whose immunities have waned after being inoculated early in the vaccine rollout, which began in late February.</p> <p>Officials are now pushing to speed up the administration of booster shots for people who were fully vaccinated more than six months ago. Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum, Seoul's No. 2 behind President Moon Jae-in, said during a virus meeting Wednesday that the interval period will be reduced to four months for people who are in their 60s or older, and for patients in nursing homes or long-term care hospitals. People in their 50s will be eligible for booster shots after five months, Kim said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Official warns: winter 'double whammy'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/fauci-shot-vaccine-standard-warns-winter-double-whammy/story?id=81213958
GIST	<p>With winter closing in and coronavirus case rates creeping up once again, White House chief medical adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci is warning that the vaccines' waning immunity combined with the highly transmissible delta variant will make for a "double whammy" that will impact "even the vaccinated people."</p> <p>"The somewhat unnerving aspect of it is that if you keep the level of dynamics of the virus in the community at a high level -- obviously the people who are most most vulnerable are the unvaccinated -- but when you have a virus as transmissible as delta, in the context of waning immunity, that dynamic is going to negatively impact even the vaccinated people. So it's a double whammy," Fauci said in a pretaped interview aired at the 2021 STAT Summit Tuesday afternoon.</p>

"You're going to see breakthrough infections, even more so than we see now among the vaccinated," he added.

His grim prediction meets a chorus of alarm bells already being sounded about COVID's renewed spread as more people head inside as the holidays approach, heralding a season of family gatherings.

The national reported average for new cases each day has surged to more than 80,000, according to federal data -- the highest in nearly a month. Forty states are currently showing high transmission, and total hospitalizations have increased for the first time in nearly 10 weeks.

Combatting any impending viral onslaught this winter hinges on how many more sleeves roll up for more shots, Fauci said. It won't only be important to persuade the roughly 60 million "recalcitrant" people who have yet to get their first dose, but also "how well we implement a booster program," he said.

Fauci added that booster doses of the COVID vaccine may become the standard for a "full" vaccination. It comes as a [growing roster of states and local jurisdictions](#) have pushed ahead of federal regulators' timeline, electing to endorse the expansion of booster shots to all adults at least six months after their second Pfizer or Moderna shot.

Though Pfizer formally asked the Food and Drug Administration to expand their booster's authorization last week, right now federal agencies only recommend the mRNA booster for people over the age of 65, have an underlying medical condition or are at high risk for exposure, at least six months after their second dose.

All Johnson & Johnson recipients over the age of 18, however, are eligible for a boost at least two months after receiving their first dose.

"I happen to believe as an immunologist and infectious disease person, that a third shot boost for an mRNA is likely -- should be part of the actual standard regimen, where a booster isn't a luxury; a booster isn't an add on; and a booster is part of what the original regimen should be -- so that when we look back on this, we're going to see that boosters are essential for an optimal vaccine regimen," Fauci said.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Russia: test did not endanger ISS
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-rejects-accusations-endangering-iss-astronauts-81199632
GIST	<p>MOSCOW -- Russian officials on Tuesday rejected accusations that they endangered astronauts aboard the International Space Station by conducting a weapons test that created more than 1,500 pieces of space junk but a White House official said the move by Russia would threaten activities in space "for years to come."</p> <p>U.S. officials on Monday accused Russia of destroying an old satellite with a missile in what they called a reckless and irresponsible strike. They said the debris could damage the space station, an assessment backed by NATO's chief.</p> <p>Astronauts now face four times greater risk than normal from space junk, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told The Associated Press. The defunct Russian satellite Cosmos 1408 was orbiting about 40 miles (65 kilometers) higher than the space station.</p> <p>The test clearly demonstrates that Russia, "despite its claims of opposing the weaponization of outer space, is willing to ... imperil the exploration and use of outer space by all nations through its reckless and irresponsible behavior," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.</p> <p>White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said Tuesday that Russia's action demonstrated its "complete disregard for the security, safety, stability and long-term sustainability of the space domain for all nations. This debris will continue to pose a direct threat to activities in outer space for years to come and puts at</p>

risk satellites all nations rely on for national security, economic prosperity and scientific discovery." He said the United States would work with its allies "as we seek to respond to this irresponsible act."

Even a fleck of paint can do major damage when orbiting at 17,500 mph (28,000 kph). Something big, upon impact, could be catastrophic to the space station.

Russia's Defense Ministry on Tuesday confirmed carrying out a test and destroying a defunct satellite that has been in orbit since 1982, but insisted that "the U.S. knows for certain that the resulting fragments, in terms of test time and orbital parameters, did not and will not pose a threat to orbital stations, spacecraft and space activities." It called remarks by U.S. officials "hypocritical."

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said the strike was carried out "with surgical precision" and posed no threat to the space station. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also charged that it is "hypocrisy" to say that Russia creates risks for peaceful activities in space.

The Russian space agency Roscosmos wouldn't confirm or deny that the strike took place, saying only that the "unconditional safety of the crew has been and remains our main priority."

Once the situation became clear early Monday morning, those on board the International Space Station — four Americans, one German and two Russians — were ordered to immediately seek shelter in their docked capsules. They spent two hours in the two capsules, finally emerging only to have to close and reopen hatches to the station's individual labs on every orbit, or 1 1/2 hours, as they passed near or through the space debris.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg agreed that Russia's actions endangered the space station.

"This was a reckless act by Russia to actually shoot down and destroy a satellite as part of a test of an anti-satellite weapons system," which created a lot of space debris, Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels.

He said it was of additional concern "because it demonstrates that Russia is now developing new weapons systems that can shoot down the satellites, can destroy important space capabilities for basic infrastructure on Earth, like communications, like navigation, or like early warning of missile launches."

The German Foreign Ministry also said it was "very concerned" by the test, which it said resulted in "additional risks" for the astronauts on the ISS.

"This irresponsible behavior carries a high risk of miscalculations and escalation," the ministry said, adding that the test underlines the urgency of an international agreement on rules for the peaceful use of space.

NASA Mission Control said the heightened threat could continue to interrupt the astronauts' science research and other work. Four of the seven crew members only arrived at the orbiting outpost on Thursday night.

A similar weapons test by China in 2007 also resulted in countless pieces of debris. One of those threatened to come dangerously close to the space station last week. While later the risk it posed was dismissed, NASA had the space station move anyway.

Anti-satellite missile tests by the U.S. in 2008 and India in 2019 were conducted at much lower altitudes, well below the space station, which orbits about 260 miles (420 kilometers) high.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Clashes: Armenia-Azerbaijan border
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/casualties-reported-clashes-armenia-azerbaijan-border-81207671

YEREVAN, Armenia -- Armenia and Azerbaijan reported military clashes on their shared border Tuesday and blamed each other for starting the conflict amid tensions between the two ex-Soviet nations that have simmered since a six-week war last year over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Armenian Defense Ministry accused Azerbaijan's military of opening fire on Armenian positions, killing one person and capturing 12 servicemen. The Azerbaijani government, meanwhile, accused Armenia of a "large-scale provocation" on the border.

Armenian lawmaker Eduard Aghajanyan told reporters that 15 Armenian soldiers were killed in Tuesday's clash, but so far there has been no official confirmation. The Azerbaijani military said two of its servicemen were wounded.

Later Tuesday, Russia's Defense Ministry reported that hostilities on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border had ceased, following talks with Moscow. Armenia's Defense Ministry confirmed that report.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have been locked in a decades-old dispute over the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh, a region that lies within Azerbaijan but was under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia since a separatist war there ended in 1994.

Moscow brokered a peace deal last November to end six weeks of fighting over the territory, during which more than 6,600 people were killed. The Russia-brokered truce allowed Azerbaijan to reclaim control over large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas that the Armenia-backed separatists controlled.

Tensions on the two nations' border have been building since May, when Armenia protested what it described as an incursion by Azerbaijani troops into its territory. Azerbaijan has insisted that its soldiers were deployed to what it considers its territory in areas where the border has yet to be demarcated. Clashes have been reported ever since.

On Monday, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan accused Azerbaijani forces of an incursion into his country's territory, and reports of fighting, with the use of artillery, followed Tuesday from both countries.

Armenia's Security Council has called on Russia to help protect the country's territorial integrity.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu spoke on the phone with his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts Tuesday, urging "both sides to cease activities that provoke the escalation of the situation," the Russian Defense Ministry said.

Pashinyan also spoke by phone to Russian President Vladimir Putin about the situation on the border, according to the Kremlin.

European Council President Charles Michel called Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and voiced concerns over the escalating tensions on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, according to Aliyev's press service.

At a U.N. Security Council meeting in New York on preventive diplomacy, the Armenian and Azerbaijani ambassadors accused each other of starting Tuesday's border clashes.

Armenian Ambassador Mher Margaryan said Azerbaijan had launched "armed attacks" that hurt international efforts to de-escalate the situation and undermine prospects for peace.

"A strong and unequivocal reaction to Azerbaijan's illegal actions is critical for preventing further major escalations of the security situation in the region and beyond," he said.

Margaryan called for urgent steps by "international actors" to prevent further escalation and demanded the "unconditional and complete withdrawal of Azerbaijani armed forces" from Armenian territory.

	<p>Azerbaijan's ambassador, Yashar Aliyev, requested the floor at the end of the meeting Tuesday evening to respond to what he called "the false and potentially misleading statement" by his Armenian counterpart.</p> <p>Aliyev said Tuesday's confrontation stemmed from "large-scale armed provocations by Armenia" and the "armed forces of Azerbaijan adequately responded."</p> <p>He said that "Armenia's continued territorial claims are the result of irresponsible actions on state level and of dangerous revanchist ideas overtly propagated in Armenia."</p> <p>After last year's war, Aliyev said, Azerbaijan expressed readiness to normalize relations with Armenia, including signing a peace treaty, but "Armenia has failed to reciprocate the peace agenda."</p> <p>Nonetheless, Aliyev said, "Azerbaijan is confident there is no alternative to the normalization of relations between the two countries ... and is determined to advance the agenda of peacebuilding, reconciliation, peaceful coexistence and development."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Intense flooding in Washington state
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/hundreds-displaced-due-intense-flooding-washington-state-latest/story?id=81200756
GIST	<p>Over 1 foot of rain has pummeled the Pacific Northwest in five days, bringing rivers into major flood stages and flooding roads and neighborhoods.</p> <p>In Whatcom County, Washington, in the northwest part of the state along the Canadian border, about 500 people were displaced Monday due to flooding, the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office said.</p> <p>"Extensive search and rescue efforts" were conducted throughout Monday, including by boat to reach residents in deep areas, the sheriff's office said.</p> <p>In Bellingham, in Whatcom County, the flooding and mudslides closed Interstate 5 overnight.</p> <p>In British Columbia, there was one fatality reported on Highway 99, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General Mike Farnworth said during a press briefing Tuesday evening, in the wake of "significant" flooding and mudslides in the southern half of the province.</p> <p>Nearly 300 people were trapped in their cars on Highway 7 east of Vancouver, David Boone, assistant chief of the Vancouver Fire Rescue Services's operations division, told ABC News. Some 500 occupants were trapped in their vehicles for over 24 hours on another part of Highway 7 but were able to drive away after the roads were cleared, he said.</p> <p>Flooding also shuttered Highway 5 in British Columbia, with one official calling the conditions "a disaster waiting to happen."</p> <p>High winds -- with gusts up to 77 mph -- toppled trees and knocked out power. An 18-wheeler was nearly knocked off a bridge.</p> <p>Tuesday morning, the rain and snow showers will begin to taper off, with conditions improving by the afternoon. But major river flooding will still be an ongoing threat, and a flood watch remains in effect through Tuesday afternoon in parts of western Washington.</p> <p>Three rivers are in major flood stage: Bogachiel, Nooksack and Skagit. The Skagit River in Mount Vernon is expected to rise to a crest of 37.6 feet by Tuesday afternoon, topping the 1990 record crest of 37.4 feet.</p>

	<p>A winter weather advisory is also in effect; over 1 foot of snow possible in the highest elevations -- above 1,500 feet -- in western Washington.</p> <p>Although nearly the entire western U.S. is in a drought, western Washington is the only area that is drought-free. Seattle has seen rain every day this month and parts of western Washington have received 40 inches of rain in the last 30 days.</p> <p>The Pacific Northwest will dry out over the next few days, before more rain arrives later this week.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 CO resort town: wildfire forces evacuations
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/fire-forces-evacuations-popular-colorado-resort-town/story?id=81205157
GIST	<p>A small wildfire has sparked mandatory evacuations in a popular Colorado resort town as wind gusts threaten to fan the flames.</p> <p>The Kruger Fire broke out Tuesday morning near Kruger Rock in Larimer County, just outside Estes Park, a mountain town with about 6,000 residents. The neighborhoods of Little Valley Drive, Hermit Park and Uplands of Fish Creek Road were ordered to evacuate that same morning.</p> <p>By Tuesday evening, the blaze had grown to 133 acres with 15% containment, according to the Larimer County Sheriff's Office.</p> <p>"Multiple resources responded and found the fire burning in very steep terrain," the sheriff's office said in a statement Tuesday. "Gusting winds and low relative humidity caused the fire to spread quickly and threatened several structures in the area."</p> <p>No structure damage from the wildfire has been reported thus far, the sheriff's office said.</p> <p>An investigation into the cause of the blaze found that high winds blew a tree onto a nearby powerline, causing it to arc and start the fire, according to the sheriff's office.</p> <p>Red flag warnings have been issued throughout Colorado over high wind gusts topping 40 miles per hour. Videos posted to social media show the fire crowning, indicating the possibility that it could spread fast.</p> <p>"Despite the gusting winds, air resources were utilized to make water and suppressant drops," the sheriff's office said. "More air resources are ordered for tomorrow along with additional fire crews."</p> <p>More than 150 personnel from various agencies were deployed to the wildfire on Tuesday, according to the sheriff's office.</p> <p>A single-engine air tanker crashed south of Estes Park that evening. The pilot, who was the only occupant of the firefighting aircraft, did not survive, according to the sheriff's office. The crash is being investigated by the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.</p> <p>Last year, Estes Park was wedged between the two largest fires in state history -- the East Troublesome Fire and the Cameron Peak Fire -- but a snowstorm in October 2020 halted the flames in their tracks.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	11/16 New cybersecurity response playbooks
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/federal-agencies-get-new-cybersecurity-response-playbooks/

GIST	<p>Federal agencies have new guidance for how to respond to cybersecurity incidents and vulnerabilities. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) released playbooks Tuesday that include standardized response procedures for federal civilian executive branch agencies facing such threats.</p> <p>President Joe Biden tasked CISA with developing the guidance in his May Executive Order on cybersecurity. The playbooks cover how agencies should manage cybersecurity processes related to incidents and vulnerabilities—including preparation, investigation, containment, reporting, and remediation.</p> <p>While the procedures were developed for use by the federal government, CISA also encourages organizations involved in other levels of government, controlling critical infrastructure, and in the private sector “review them to benchmark their own vulnerability and incident response practices.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Amazon bans Visa credit cards in UK
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/amazon-blames-high-fees-for-future-ban-on-visa-credit-cards-in-uk/
GIST	<p>Amazon has warned customers that the firm will stop accepting Visa credit cards for UK payments in a matter of months.</p> <p>The announcement, made via email to customers on Wednesday, says that purchases made through the Amazon.co.uk domain will no longer accept Visa credit cards issued in the United Kingdom from January 19, 2022.</p> <p>Customers in the UK will still be able to use debit cards -- including Visa debit cards -- as well as non-Visa cards including Mastercard, Amex, and Eurocard.</p> <p>"We know this may be inconvenient, and we're here to help you through this transition," the company said, urging customers to update any default Visa credit card payment setups to alternative methods.</p> <p>Amazon has blamed the "high fees Visa charges for processing credit card transactions" for the change.</p> <p>The decision could be due to Visa's hike to fees tacked on to UK-EU customer purchases following Brexit, from October this year. So-called interchange fees were reportedly increased to interregional caps to up to 1.15% for debit cards and 1.5% for consumer credit cards by Visa, rates far higher than previously-imposed EU caps.</p> <p>Mastercard, too, has increased its interchange fees. However, Visa is a far larger card issuer in the United Kingdom and the decision will likely impact millions of customers.</p> <p>As noted by UK financial expert Martin Lewis, this could be a "possible negotiating tactic for Amazon to get its fees reduced."</p> <p>"UK shoppers can use their Visa debit and credit cards at Amazon UK today and throughout the holiday season," a Visa spokesperson told ZDNet. "We are very disappointed that Amazon is threatening to restrict consumer choice in the future."</p> <p>"When consumer choice is limited, nobody wins," Visa's spokesperson continued. "We have a long-standing relationship with Amazon, and we continue to work toward a resolution, so our cardholders can use their preferred Visa credit cards at Amazon UK without Amazon-imposed restrictions come January 2022."</p> <p>ZDNet has reached out to Amazon with additional queries and we will update when we hear back.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Adult site users, models info exposed
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SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/adult-cam-model-user-records-exposed-stripchat-breach/176372/
GIST	<p>A database containing the highly sensitive information on both users and models on the popular adult cam site StripChat were discovered online, left completely unprotected. The data exposure puts models and users at risk of extortion, violence and more.</p> <p>Stripchat is a popular site founded in 2016 and based in Cyprus that sells live access to nude models.</p> <p>Volodymyr “Bob” Diachenko, head of security research Comparitech, reported that he discovered the database on an Elasticsearch cluster on Nov. 5. It contained about 200 million Stripchat records, he said, including 65 million user records containing email addresses, IP addresses, the amount in tips they gave to models, a timestamp of when the account was created and the last activity.</p> <p>Another database contained about 421,000 records for the platform’s models, including their usernames, gender, studio IDs, tip menus and prices, live status and what is called their “strip score.”</p> <p>It’s unclear if anyone with nefarious purposes managed to access it before it was secured on Nov. 7.</p> <p>Stripchat Data Exposure Threat</p> <p>“The exposure could pose a significant privacy risk for both Stripchat viewers and models,” Diachenko said. “If the data was stolen, they could face harassment, humiliation, stalking, extortion, phishing and other threats, both online and offline.”</p> <p>Stripchat user and model information could also be used in targeted phishing campaigns.</p> <p>“Victims should be on the lookout for targeted phishing emails from fraudsters posing as Stripchat or a related company,” Diachenko warned. “Never click on links or attachments in unsolicited emails.”</p> <p>The privacy risk for both users and models becomes more significant if the exposed information is cross-referenced with other breaches, so the full profile of a person is drawn.</p> <p>“Stripchat data, in fact, does not reveal a lot of personal info, and I do feel that a lot of users visiting such sites prefer not to state their real identities, emails etc.,” Diachenko told Threatpost. “They mostly use VPN services, too, to hide their IP addresses. Still, a lot of this info can be matched with other data breaches and some additional data would come up, that’s my point here.”</p> <p>The exposure was reported to Stripchat on Nov.5, with multiple contact points via email and Twitter subsequently. While the company didn’t directly respond to Diachenko’s disclosure, he said that as of Nov. 7, the data was secured.</p> <p>“Sites like Stripchat should have stronger security practices and at least employ incident response protocols when receiving alerts like this from the security community,” he told Threatpost.</p> <p>Look Out for Lewd Phishing Lures</p> <p>Lewd phishing lures are increasingly being used in business email compromise (BEC) campaigns, according to research that GreatHorn published last summer. The firm found a stunning 974-percent uptick in social-engineering scams using salacious material, mostly aimed at employees with male-sounding names.</p> <p>“It doesn’t always involve explicit material, but the goal is to put the user off balance, frightened – any excited emotional state – to decrease the brain’s ability to make rational decisions,” according to the report.</p> <p>Being confronted at work with past Stripchat activities would certainly make rational thinking difficult.</p> <p>The pandemic has been a boon to cybersex sites like Stripchat: The company said that following the onset of the pandemic and lockdowns, the platform saw a 72 percent rise in traffic and added 906,181,416 new users in 2020. But, as these platforms gain users, they become bigger targets for attacks.</p>

Leaky Clouds Persist

Stripchat joins a long and illustrious list of [companies with leaky clouds](#), VIP Games exposed the user data of 66,000 users early in 2021. [Dating sites](#), even [Hobby Lobby, all have fallen victim to a misconfigured cloud](#). And it's not just the private sector. Last summer, Diachenko found an [exposed Elasticsearch cluster containing](#) 1.9 million terrorist watchlist records.

When it comes to public-facing cloud storage, Diachekno called on organizations to do much more to protect their data.

"Exposure of records through misconfiguration is a major issue whether we are talking about public cloud misconfigurations or of any service exposed to the internet," he said in an email to Threatpost.

"Organizations needs to continuously monitor all resources deployed in their enterprise to minimize risks of such exposure. Such records can be sold on the dark web or used for further attacks especially if credentials are involved."

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HEADLINE	11/16 Hack-and-leak for hire as litigation service
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/hack-and-leak-for-hire-being-sold-as-litigation-assistance
GIST	<p>At CyberWarCon on Tuesday, Reuters reporters Christopher Bing and Raphael Satter presented new details into an ongoing investigation into hack-and-leak-as-a-service being offered by Indian and Gulf-state businesses, often to clients looking to impact private sector civil litigation.</p> <p>Hack-and-leak operations are often associated with nation-states, such as Russia's leak of Democratic Party officials' emails to interfere with the 2016 election. But it is not just nations who can value from controlling media narratives.</p> <p>In fact, said Bing and Satter, after conducting hundreds of interviews with victims, obtaining leaked files and conducting extensive research, several non-governmental groups are leveraging commercial hacking services to damage their rivals.</p> <p>"Over the course of the last two years or so, we've interviewed over 300 people that are in this camp and asked the question: 'What was happening in your life when you were targeted by these hackers? What does this email mean to you because this particular subject line?' And over and over and over again, they described it they were in the middle of the litigation at the time that happened," said Bing.</p> <p>Over the course of their investigations, Bing and Satter have obtained an 80,000-record archive of attacks from one commercial service involved in hack-and-leak-for-hire, giving them unprecedented visibility into how one firm conducts its campaigns. The records were provided from a service provider working with that contractor.</p> <p>Satter and Bing found that the clients of the firms involved in hack-and-leak-for-hire tend to come either from the West or Gulf states. Victims are concentrated in the U.S. and Europe, with a second tier of targets in South America.</p> <p>Many of the companies offering services operated IT security firms as a legitimate cover, including BellTroX, who were identified last year as a hack-for-hire firm by Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto. And many of the companies, including BellTroX, had connections to Allin Security, said Bing and Satter, which was first accused of being a hack-for-hire group in 2013.</p> <p>The hack-and-leak-as-a-service firms (HALaaS) are not particularly strong at operational security, and have been tied to illicit code dumps in the past. Bing and Satter traced the firms to their advertisements in investigator forums, where the HALaaS operators advertised as legitimate litigation assistance services. Several former employees of those firms had resumes on LinkedIn and job sites that mentioned email interception and other hacking job experience.</p>

	<p>The leaking component of the operation involves dumping access to files and emails onto anonymous WordPress sites which can then be leveraged by other groups. In one prominent case mentioned by the Reuters reporters, a victim was sued for the contents of their emails only a month after the emails were leaked.</p> <p>Victims, their friends, lawyers and families, face a full-court press of well-formatted phishing emails to gain access.</p> <p>It appears from the documents that the cost of these campaigns can be as high as \$1 million.</p> <p>The reporters ended their talk challenging researchers to consider private actors in attributions for traditionally nation-state-oriented activities.</p> <p>"We want to turn it over to the audience because when you guys discover [the next operation] down the line, I don't just want to you to say, oh, you know, it's Russia, or North Korea or or even India," said Satter.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Facebook: Afghan then-officials targeted
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/hackers-targeted-afghan-officials-facebook-amid-taliban-offensive
GIST	<p>Facebook revealed Tuesday it had worked to block a hacker group that targeted the accounts of people tied to Afghanistan's then-government and security forces as the Taliban was moving in to take power.</p> <p>The Pakistan-based group, known as SideCopy, used "romantic lures" from what appeared to be young women on the platform to try to trick the targets into giving the hackers access to their pages.</p> <p>Executives from Meta, Facebook's parent company, did not detail what the ultimate motive appeared to be but noted the attacks were directed at "those with links to the Afghan government, military and law enforcement in Kabul."</p> <p>The hackers' main technique, known as phishing, was to share links to malicious sites hosting harmful software or to encourage the targets to download compromised chat apps in a campaign that ramped up between April and August.</p> <p>After a nearly 20-year insurgency, the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in August as the US-backed government and military collapsed.</p> <p>As part of the attacks revealed by Facebook, the hackers also set up fake mobile app stores and compromised legitimate sites in an effort to get their prey's Facebook credentials.</p> <p>SideCopy also sought to get their victims to download apps containing malware as part of an effort that "had the hallmarks of a well-resourced and persistent operation while obfuscating who's behind it."</p> <p>The company did not provide figures on the number of accounts potentially affected or the nature of the information hacked.</p> <p>It said it has shared the information with the relevant authorities, and warned those affected.</p> <p>The California-based group also said it "removed" the hackers involved in the Afghan operation as well as a set of three groups of hackers that targeted opposition or government critics in Syria.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Ethical hackers stymie \$27B of cybercrime
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ethical-hackers-stymie-27bn-of/

GIST	<p>Ethical hackers have prevented \$27bn worth of cybercrime during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to new research by California crowdsourced cybersecurity platform Bugcrowd.</p> <p>The finding was part of Bugcrowd's latest annual <i>Inside the Mind of a Hacker</i> report, which was published today. The research is based on the analysis of survey responses and security research conducted on the platform from May 1, 2020, to August 31, 2021, in addition to millions of proprietary data points collected on vulnerabilities from 2,961 security programs.</p> <p>Nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) said vulnerabilities had increased since the outbreak of COVID-19. Most hackers (80%) found a vulnerability they had not encountered before the pandemic.</p> <p>Almost half of the hackers (45%) said they believe that lack of scope inhibits the discovery of critical vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Other key takeaways from the report were that 91% of ethical hackers do not believe that point-in-time testing can secure companies year-round.</p> <p>Commenting, Tim Wade, technical director of Vectra's CTO team, said: "Security testers asserting that point-in-time testing cannot secure companies year-round is a reflection of what software delivery professionals have known for years and years – shorter, more agile cycles improve quality."</p> <p>Most of the hackers (71%) said that they earn more from the San Francisco-based Bugcrowd now that most companies work remotely.</p> <p>Casey Ellis, founder and CTO at Bugcrowd, said that for many of the platform's hackers, earnings are going up and payments are being delivered faster.</p> <p>"Our report found that 47% of ethical hackers earned more on Bugcrowd than they did in the previous period and the time between sending a report and receiving payment had decreased on the Bugcrowd platform, in some cases less than 30 minutes," said Ellis.</p> <p>Ellis added that he was inspired by the ingenuity and entrepreneurial mindset of individuals drawn to ethical hacking.</p> <p>"Our latest report shows that 79% of ethical hackers taught themselves how to hack using online resources," said Ellis.</p> <p>"The report also found that this is the youngest, and most ethnically diverse, generation of ethical hackers in history."</p> <p>Ellis described the impact of this new wave of White Hat hackers on thwarting cyber-attacks and advancing the industry as "monumental" and "sure to continue."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Evolution of 6 Iranian hacking groups
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/microsoft-warns-of-the-evolution-of-six-iranian-hacking-groups/
GIST	<p>The Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC) has presented an analysis of the evolution of several Iranian threat actors at the CyberWarCon 2021, and their findings show increasingly sophisticated attacks.</p> <p>Since September 2020, Microsoft has been tracking six Iranian hacking groups deploying ransomware and exfiltrating data to cause disruption and destruction for victims.</p>

Over time, these hacking groups have evolved into competent threat actors capable of conducting cyber-espionage, using multi-platform malware, disrupting operations with wipers and ransomware, carrying out phishing and password spraying attacks, and even setting up sophisticated supply chain operations.

All of these groups deploy ransomware to achieve their objectives and were deployed in waves, usually six to eight weeks apart.

This year, Microsoft observed the actors scanning for many vulnerabilities, including those targeting Fortinet FortiOS SSL VPN, Microsoft Exchange Servers vulnerable to ProxyShell, and more.

It is estimated that by scanning for unpatched Fortinet VPN systems alone, the actors obtained over 900 valid credentials in plain text form so far this year.

Patient credential harvesting

Another trend that has emerged this past year is an upgraded level of patience and persistence in social engineering campaigns, indicative of a sophisticated actor.

Previously, actors like Phosphorus (Charming Kitten) were sending unsolicited emails with malicious links and laced attachments, a bulk tactic that [had limited success](#).

Now, Phosphorus follows the time-consuming path of "interview invitations," a method ushered by the North Korean hacking group "Lazarus."

During these attacks, Phosphorus actors call the targets and walk them through clicking on credential harvesting pages as part of the interview process.

A new group that follows equally patient tactics is called "Curium," and Microsoft's analysts say this actor leverages an extensive network of fake social media accounts, usually masqueraded as attractive women.

They contact the targets and build rapport over some time, chatting daily and winning their trust.

Then, one day, they send a malicious document that looks similar to benign files sent previously, resulting in stealthy malware drops.

A similar tactic was used by the hacking group linked to Hamas, who [created fake dating apps to lure Israel Defence Forces](#) (IDF) into installing malware-laced mobile apps.

It is unclear if these two campaigns are linked.

Brute forcing a way in

Although some actors move more methodically, others prefer to use "brute force" attacks to obtain access to Office 365 accounts aggressively.

One such threat actor is DEV-0343, who was seen [targeting US defense tech companies](#) and running massive password spraying attacks [last month](#).

Microsoft reports that DEV-0343 moves a lot quicker than the groups mentioned above, typically gaining access to the target accounts on the same day.

Also, the researchers have seen overlaps such as the simultaneous targeting of specific accounts by both DEV-0343 and 'Europium' operators, clear evidence of coordinated action.

Iranian hackers continue to evolve

Microsoft has been tracking Iranian actors since almost a decade ago, and the tech giant has had some success in [taking parts of their infrastructure offline](#).

	<p>Despite these efforts, Phosphorus has managed to deliver significant blows, with a notable example being the hacking of high-ranking officials in October last year.</p> <p>MSTIC's most recent observations underline that Phosphorus is not only alive and well, but a shape-shifting threat backed by collaborators of unprecedented pluralism.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 New Emotet campaigns hitting worldwide
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/here-are-the-new-emotet-spam-campaigns-hitting-mailboxes-worldwide/
GIST	<p>The Emotet malware kicked into action yesterday after a ten-month hiatus with multiple spam campaigns delivering malicious documents to mailboxes worldwide.</p> <p>Emotet is a malware infection that is distributed through spam campaigns with malicious attachments. If a user opens the attachment, malicious macros or JavaScript will download the Emotet DLL and load it into memory using PowerShell.</p> <p>Once loaded, the malware will search for and steal emails to use in future spam campaigns and drop additional payloads such as TrickBot or Qbot that commonly lead to ransomware infections.</p> <p>Emotet spamming begins again</p> <p>Last night, cybersecurity researcher Brad Duncan published a SANS Handler Diary on how the Emotet botnet had begun spamming multiple email campaigns to infect devices with the Emotet malware.</p> <p>According to Duncan, the spam campaigns use replay-chain emails to lure the recipient into opening attached malicious Word, Excel, and password-protected ZIP files.</p> <p>Reply-chain phishing emails are when previously stolen email threads are used with spoofed replies to distribute malware to other users.</p> <p>In the samples shared by Duncan, we can see Emotet using reply-chains related to a "missing wallet," a CyberMonday sale, canceled meetings, political donation drives, and the termination of dental insurance.</p> <p>Attached to these emails are Excel or Word documents with malicious macros or a password-protected ZIP file attachment containing a malicious Word document...</p> <p>There are currently two different malicious documents being distributed in the new Emotet spam campaigns.</p> <p>The first is an Excel document template that states that the document will only work on desktops or laptops and that the user needs to click on 'Enable Content' to view the contents properly.</p> <p>The malicious Word attachment is using the 'Red Dawn' template and says that as the document is in "Protected" mode, users must enable content and editing to view it properly.</p> <p>How Emotet attachments infect devices</p> <p>When you open Emotet attachments, the document template will state that previewing is not available and that you need to click on 'Enable Editing' and 'Enable Content' to view the content properly.</p> <p>However, once you click on these buttons, malicious macros will be enabled that launch a PowerShell command to download the Emotet loader DLL from a compromised WordPress site and save it to the C:\ProgramData folder.</p> <p>Once downloaded, the DLL will be launched using C:\Windows\SysWo64\rundll32.exe, which will copy the DLL to a random folder under %LocalAppData% and then reruns the DLL from that folder.</p>

After some time, Emotet will configure a startup value under the **HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run** to launch the malware when Windows starts.

The Emotet malware will now silently remain running in the background while waiting for commands to execute from its command and control server.

These commands could be to search for email to steal, spread to other computers, or install additional payloads, such as the TrickBot or Qbot trojans.

At this time, BleepingComputer has not seen any additional payloads dropped by Emotet, which has also been confirmed by Duncan's tests.

"I have only seen spambot activity from my recent Emotet-infected hosts," Duncan told BleepingComputer. "I think Emotet is just getting re-established this week."

"Maybe we'll see some additional malware payloads in the coming weeks," the researcher added.

Defending against Emotet

Malware and botnet monitoring org [Abuse.ch](#) has released a [list of 245 command and control servers](#) that perimeter firewalls can block to prevent communication with command and control servers.

Blocking communication to C2s will also prevent Emotet from dropping further payloads on compromised devices.

An international law enforcement operation [took down the Emotet botnet](#) in January 2021, and for ten months, the malware has not been active.

However, starting Sunday night, active TrickBot infections began dropping the Emotet loader on already infected devices, rebuilding the botnet for spamming activity.

The return of Emotet is a significant event that all network admins, security professionals, and Windows admins must monitor for new developments.

In the past, Emotet was considered the [most widely distributed malware](#) and has a good chance of regaining its previous ranking.

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HEADLINE	11/17 'Exploit-as-a-service' emerging as reality?
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/threat-actors-offer-millions-for-zero-days-developers-talk-of-exploit-as-a-service/
GIST	<p>While mostly hidden in private conversations, details sometimes emerge about the parallel economy of vulnerability exploits on underground forums, revealing just how fat of a wallet some threat actors have.</p> <p>Some adversaries claim multi-million U.S. dollar budgets for acquiring zero-day exploits but those that don't have this kind of money may still have a chance to use zero-days if a new 'exploit-as-a-service' idea becomes reality.</p> <p>Large exploit acquisition budgets</p> <p>The dialog about vulnerabilities, both old and new, on cybercriminal communities sometimes includes offers to buy exploits for big money.</p>

One forum user in early May offered \$25,000 for proof-of-concept (PoC) exploit code for CVE-2021-22893, a critical-severity vulnerability in Pulse Secure VPN that had been [leveraged by Chinese hackers](#) since at least April.

Another actor with deeper pockets claimed a budget of up to \$3 million for no-interaction remote code execution (RCE) bugs, the so-called zero-click exploits, for Windows 10 and Linux. The same user offered up to \$150,000 for original solutions for “unused startup methods in Windows 10” so malware would be active every time the system booted.

By comparison, exploit acquisition company Zerodium offers up to \$1 million for a zero-click RCE in Windows 10. The highest payout from the broker is up to \$2.5 million for a zero-click full-chain persistence in Android, followed by \$2 million for the iOS equivalent.

The posts were captured by researchers at risk protection company Digital Shadows, who looked at threat actors' activity to take advantage of security weaknesses.

During the investigation, they observed some actors engaged in talks about zero-day prices as high as \$10 million.

The researchers note that such prices are no longer restricted to nation-state hackers and that cybercriminals, particularly ransomware groups, can also afford them.

Exploit-as-a-service option

Completing a big sale, though, is not easy and may take a long time. If it takes too long, developers may lose the chance to make big money because competitors may come up with an exploit variant, dragging down the price.

For this reason, cybercriminals are now discussing an “exploit-as-a-service” solution that would allow exploit developers to rent out a zero-day exploit to multiple parties.

This alternative could generate huge profits to zero-day exploit developers, while they wait for a definitive buyer, the researchers say.

“Additionally, with this model, renting parties could test the proposed zero-day and later decide whether to purchase the exploit on an exclusive or non-exclusive basis” - Digital Shadows

Just like in the case of malware-as-a-service, renting out the exploits would let less-skilled adversaries deploy more complex attacks and hit more valuable targets.

Underground forum user types

The report from Digital Shadows highlights that adversaries, financially motivated cybercriminals or state-sponsored hackers, are quick to integrate new attack methods and are constantly looking for new exploit code.

“This scene is bursting with a variety of widespread actors who boast a whole range of technical expertise and motives” - [Digital Shadows](#)

Users of various skill levels share knowledge and tools to improve their attacks and build stronger relationships that could prove lucrative in the longer run.

Some users stand out in these communities because of the dialog they generate either on the public or private face of the forum on vulnerability exploitation.

Digital Shadows researchers categorized some of them, admitting that “there can be major crossover” between them:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-rollers: threat actors that sell and buy zero-day exploits for prices starting from \$1,000,000, with wallets that may be sponsored by a nation-state or successful entrepreneurs • General merchants: sellers that trade less-critical vulnerabilities, exploit kits, and databases with info (name and IPs) of companies with unpatched vulnerabilities • General buyers: individuals with technical skills that are interested in buying exploits but rarely have the funds to make a purchase; they usually wait for the prices to go down • Code communicators: actors that share and advertise PoC exploit code on GitHub • Show-offs: highly-technical forum members that discuss bugs, participate in competitions, and share some of their knowledge on performing an exploit • Newbies: less-technical users that learn from more knowledgeable forum members' they sometimes apply what they learn and share the info on other forums to earn more credit or just as a community service • Newshounds: contributors that share articles and news about recently discovered vulnerabilities <p>Threat actor communities are highly active and deeply connected to the infosec technical literature, striving to come up with new attack methods that would give them access to bigger targets.</p> <p>They are not necessarily looking for new vulnerabilities, although these are the most coveted, but also explore older bugs that did not receive enough attention and could be exploited.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 New Zealand critical networks under attack
SOURCE	https://portswigger.net/daily-swig/number-of-cyber-attacks-infiltrating-critical-new-zealand-networks-soars?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>New Zealand's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has observed a 15% year-on-year jump in cyber-attacks against the country's "nationally significant" organizations.</p> <p>More than 400 such incidents were recorded between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021, up from 352 a year earlier, according to the NCSC's latest annual threat report, published today (November 16).</p> <p>More alarmingly still, the proportion of these incidents that reached the post-compromise stage – where threat actors manage to access and move laterally through networks or otherwise cause the victim harm – more than doubled, from 15% to 33%.</p> <p>The other 67% of attacks failed to get past pre-compromise phases like network scanning, brute-forcing of credentials, and attempts to exploit vulnerable software.</p> <p>Ransomware and denial-of-service attacks, both rife in line with international trends, accounted for a significant share of post-compromise attacks against New Zealand-based targets.</p> <p>Outrunning the patching cycle</p> <p>The most widely deployed attack technique was the identification via automated scanning and exploitation of security vulnerabilities in public-facing applications.</p> <p>Adversaries, noted the NCSC, were increasingly able to exploit software flaws faster than even the most security-conscious, well-resourced organizations could patch them – sometimes within a day or two of their public disclosure.</p> <p>By contrast, phishing is becoming a noticeably less effective means of infiltrating networks as organizations and their employees wise up to the threat, the agency observed.</p> <p>Rise of ransomware</p> <p>There was a near doubling in the proportion of attacks attributed to criminally or financially motivated – as opposed to state-sponsored – threat actors, observed the NCSC.</p>

The 110 incidents of this nature tracked in the latest reporting period accounted for 27% of all incidents, up from 14% year on year.

“This is a trend that has been reflected in public reporting of high-profile cases of disruptive ransomware and denial-of-service attacks affecting New Zealand private and public sector [organizations](#),” said NCSC director Lisa Fong.

Blurred lines

The 28% of attacks linked to state-sponsored actors reflected a rise in absolute terms.

One marker of nation state-backed attacks is their stealthier nature, suggested Fong.

“[State-sponsored activity](#) is less likely to disrupt services and, indeed, sophisticated actors will go to great lengths to hide their activity from detection, while attempting to extract valuable data that may help in gaining a geostrategic or political advantage,” she said.

However, distinguishing between state and criminal actors is increasingly tricky as the distinctions blur, noted Fong.

“State actors sometimes work alongside or provide havens for criminal groups, and we are increasingly seeing criminal groups now using capabilities once only used by sophisticated state actors,” she said.

Harms averted

The NCSC estimates that its detect-and-disrupt capabilities have prevented NZ\$119 million (US\$84 million) worth of harm from being visited upon New Zealand’s critical organizations in the past 12 months through incidents averted or mitigated, and NZ\$284 million (US\$200 million) since 2016.

In particular, the agency trumpeted the impact of its [Malware Free Networks](#) service, which shares threat intelligence with partners such as internet service providers.

The NCSC estimates the service disrupted more than 2,000 malicious attacks and incidents in its first 12 months of operation.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Belarus govt. behind anti-NATO campaign?
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/belarus-government-accused-of-partial-responsibility-for-ghostwriter-hacking/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Belarusian government has been accused of at least "partial responsibility" for Ghostwriter attacks in Europe.</p> <p>While cybersecurity companies often err on the side of caution when it comes to the attribution of threat groups, Mandiant says that it has "high confidence" that Ghostwriter, also linked to UNC115 activities, is a cybercriminal outfit potentially working on behalf of the country's government.</p> <p>Sanctions were placed on Belarus earlier this year after the forced diversion of a commercial plane into Belarus airspace to arrest a passenger, a dissident journalist called Roman Protasevich. Now, in retaliation, the country's President Alexander Lukashenko has been accused of engineering a migrant crisis to destabilize the EU.</p> <p>However, it seems that retribution may go further, with the attribution of Ghostwriter to the ruling government.</p> <p>The European Council has previously accused Russia of Ghostwriter involvement.</p>

According to the cybersecurity researchers, Russian interference cannot be "ruled out," but other indicators suggest that Belarusian interests are at the heart of the operation, in which government and private sector entities in Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Germany are commonly targeted.

In addition, Ghostwriter has also been involved in attacks against Belarusian dissidents, media, and individual journalists.

UNC1151 -- [active since 2016](#) -- and Ghostwriter once focused on promoting anti-NATO material through phishing, spoofing, and hijacking vulnerable websites. However, from 2020, the groups expanded their operations in attempts to influence Polish politics and to steal sensitive information via credential theft.

UNC1151 also targeted Belarusian media outlets and opposition members ahead of the 2020 election, a [disputed landslide](#) win. No attacks have been recorded against Russian or Belarus state entities.

"Additionally, in several cases, individuals targeted by UNC1151 before the 2020 Belarusian election were later arrested by the Belarusian government," Mandiant says.

Many of Ghostwriter's campaigns are focused on narratives that are anti-NATO. Since mid-2020, the group has spread content accusing NATO of corruption, the military of spreading COVID-19, and of corruption in Lithuanian and Polish politics. The EU has also been criticized in recent campaigns.

"Ghostwriter narratives, particularly those critical of neighboring governments, have been featured on Belarusian state television as fact," the researchers added. "We are unable to ascertain whether this is part of a coordinated strategy or if it is simply Belarusian state TV promoting narratives that are consistent with regime interest and being unconcerned with accuracy."

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HEADLINE	11/16 Ransomware masquerades code libraries
SOURCE	https://www.theregister.com/2021/11/16/nobloxs_typosquatting_discord/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Since early September, Josh Muir and five other maintainers of the noblox.js package, have been trying to prevent cybercriminals from distributing ransomware through similarly named code libraries.</p> <p>Noblox.js is a wrapper for the Roblox API, which many gamers use to automate interactions with the hugely popular Roblox game platform. And for the past few months the software has been targeted by "a user who is hell-bent on attacking our user-base with malware, and continues to make packages to this end," explained Muir in an email to <i>The Register</i>.</p> <p>This miscreant, with the assistance of at least one other, has been "typosquatting" the noblox.js package by uploading similarly named packages that deliver ransomware to NPM, a registry for open source JavaScript libraries, and then promoting the malware-laden files via Discord, a messaging and chat service.</p> <p>Last month, security firm Sontatype published a blog post about the poisoned noblox.js lookalikes, but dismissed this particular software supply chain compromise as a likely prank.</p> <p>Muir begs to differ. "I believe Sonatype described this attack as a potential 'prank' – I assure you it is not, but more a persistent and continuous attack on our library and its users," he said.</p> <p>No prank, someone's stalking kids</p> <p>Muir said he's aware of at least six libraries created with confusingly similar names, to dupe the unwitting unto downloading the compromised code rather than the legitimate noblox.js library.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• noblox.js-rpc• noblox.js-proxy• noblox.js-beta• noblox.js-promise

- noblox.js-promises
- discord.buttons-js

"We have reported all of these, and noblox.js-rpc is the only one currently online," said Muir in a message on Sunday. "The first of these attacks, discord.buttons-js, was created as long ago as the 7th September, and was the first. Despite its title relating to Discord, it had the noblox.js Readme file."

Since then, noblox.js-rpc has been flagged and removed.

In an email to *The Register*, Ax Sharma, a senior security researcher at Sonatype, confirmed that the company is seeing more and more malicious NPM packages, including another noblox.js typosquat called [noblox.js-rpc](#) that the security firm reported to NPM.

"The package is by the same threat actor who had previously published [fake Noblox packages](#) delivering ransomware," said Sharma. "The threat actor also maintains a Discord server to share information on the infected repositories, and solicit ransom amounts from impacted victims."

Discord not exactly on form

Sharma said this isn't the first time Discord has been used by threat actors to collaborate on and host malicious payloads. He pointed to the [CursedGrabber](#) NPM malware that Sonatype spotted a year ago. It used Discord attachments to serve malware and webhooks to exfiltrate data.

"Because some of these typosquats are cleverly named, differing just by a character from the name of the legitimate package, it is plausible some developers were infected by these packages, although the full scope of the impact remains unknown and yet to be assessed," said Sharma. "We are not aware of any Sonatype customers being impacted by these malicious packages thus far."

Indeed, the target audience appears to be kids. Minors represent the majority of those using noblox.js. Muir said those responsible are spreading malware by joining Discord servers with young users – according to [Roblox](#), "[T]he majority of our users are under the age of 13" – to gain a position of trust and convince them to download a compromised library.

"Looking purely at the number of installs for these packages, we estimate somewhere around [200 users](#) have installed the malware," said Muir. "It is difficult to determine an exact total, as several of the packages have artificially inflated install counts – we presume to make them appear more legitimate."

Muir said among those who appear to have been victimized, he or his fellow maintainers have been in touch with four of them. He provided a screenshot of the "Condos" server that's used as a callback point for victims to arrange payment to have their ransomed files released. (There are many ["Condos" servers](#).) One of his fellow maintainers, he said, had loaded up the ransomware in a virtual machine and noted that it references the discord.gg/condos server.

Muir said he has reason to believe at least one minor was blackmailed with stolen files and that this has been reported to Discord.

While GitHub's NPM has been reasonably responsive to takedown requests, Muir said, Discord hasn't been nearly as attentive.

"Discord generally doesn't deal with these issues if the original messages are deleted, and the user in question frequently deletes his messages or uses alternate accounts to avoid action," explained Muir. "This is even the case if we report the messages and then they are deleted – which means in the majority of cases, offenders are not caught."

Discord, according to security firm Sophos, has become [a popular](#) malware distribution channel and is commonly used for malware command-and-control messaging.

Odd timing

Reports submitted to Discord's Trust & Safety team, Muir said, have been delayed or ignored. He said he submitted a ticket on November 1st and heard back on November 3 asking him to provide an urgency level so Discord could triage his request. He said he marked it as urgent and two weeks on there's been no action taken.

"That being said, Discord's lack of action is somewhat shocking given the Discord server in question has the invite discord.gg/condos, and is primarily dedicated to the creation of depraved [Roblox condos](#), which are sex games aimed at minors," said Muir. "This server has 50,000 members, so it is by no means a small server."

He speculates that some of these are fake bot accounts, but said there were 12,000 online at the time he wrote *The Register*, which suggests at least some of those accounts are real.

On Monday, about an hour after *The Register* asked Discord for comment, Muir received a note from Discord's Trust & Safety Team stating that they've opened an investigation.

"Platform security is a priority for us. Discord relies on a mix of proactive scanning – such as antivirus scanning – and reactive reports to detect malware and viruses on our service before they reach users," a Discord spokesperson told *The Register*.

"We also work proactively to locate and remove communities or individuals misusing Discord for this purpose. Once we become aware of these cases or bad actors, we remove the content and take appropriate action on any participants."

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HEADLINE	11/16 Hackers compromise London news site
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkpbdm/hackers-compromised-middle-east-eye-news-website-to-hack-visitors-researchers-say
GIST	<p>A group of hackers compromised a popular London-based news website that focuses on the Middle East with the goal of hacking its visitors, according to researchers.</p> <p>On Tuesday, cybersecurity firm ESET published a report detailing the hacking campaign, which spanned from March 2020 until August of this year. During this time, according to the report, hackers compromised around 20 websites, including Middle East Eye, a popular independent news site that covers the Middle East and Africa and is based in the UK.</p> <p>The hackers compromised these websites in what are technically known as watering hole attacks, a type of cyberattack where hackers use legitimate websites to target people who visit them. In this case, the hackers did not target all visitors of the websites, but only specific ones, according to ESET.</p> <p>"We were never able to get the final payload. So it shows that attackers are very careful in the selection of the targets," Matthieu Faou, a researcher at ESET, told Motherboard in a phone call.</p> <p>Because the researchers could not retrieve the malware, "we don't know who are the final targets," Faou said.</p> <p>ESET researchers explained in the report that the hackers also compromised several government websites in Iran, Syria, and Yemen, as well as the sites of an Italian aerospace company and a South African government owned defense conglomerate—all websites with links to the Middle East. The hackers, according to ESET, may have been customers of the Israeli spyware vendor Candiru, a company that was recently put on a denylist by the US Government.</p> <p>Candiru is one of the most mysterious spyware providers out there. The company has no website, and it has allegedly changed names several times. Candiru offers "high-end cyber intelligence platform dedicated</p>

to infiltrate PC computers, networks, mobile handsets," [according to a document seen by Haaretz](#). The Israeli newspaper was the first one to report Candiru's existence in 2019. Since then, several cybersecurity companies and groups such as [Kaspersky Lab](#), [Microsoft](#), [Google](#), and [Citizen Lab](#), have tracked its malware.

Faou is scheduled to present his findings at the CYBERWARCON conference in Washington D.C. on Tuesday.

Faou said that he contacted some of the websites affected, but did not receive an answer from any of them. None of them are currently compromised, he said, and it's unclear if that's because the site owners caught the hackers and removed the malicious code, or the hackers cleaned up after themselves to hide their tracks.

When Motherboard reached out to Middle East Eye, Mahmoud Bondok, the site's head of digital development, said: "We were actually just made aware of it all and trying to ensure that the compromise itself is no longer active as a priority."

On Tuesday, Middle East Eye issued a press release condemning the watering hole attack against its site.

"Middle East Eye is no stranger to such attempts to take our website down by state and non state actors. Substantial sums of money have been spent trying to take us out," Middle East Eye editor in chief David Hearst said in the release. "This has not stopped us reporting what is going on in all corners of the region and I am confident that they will not stop us in future. Despite these efforts, our journalism has reached a global audience."

Middle East Eye also said that the site is now secure.

"Middle East Eye is constantly reviewing its security arrangements with leading IT software security companies. As with any attempt to disrupt our service, we are building cyber defences to meet this threat," the press release read. "At present we are confident that this attack has not compromised our ability to bring investigative and original reporting from the region."

During their investigation, Faou and his colleagues found that the hackers were using multiple domains for the command and control servers that connected to the malware. Two of those domains (webfx[.]cc and engagebay[.]cc) connected to a server [previously identified as belonging to Candiru by Citizen Lab](#), a cybersecurity research organization housed at the University of Toronto's Munk School, according to ESET.

Bill Marczak, a senior researcher at Citizen Lab, confirmed to Motherboard that those domains did connect to the Candiru server.

That's why ESET concludes with "medium confidence" that the hackers in this campaign are customers of Candiru.

Candiru did not respond to a request for comment sent to a series of email addresses that belong to the company.

This is not the first time Middle East Eye is caught in the crosshairs of hackers using Israeli spyware tools. In 2016, [Citizen Lab reported](#) that government hackers using NSO Group's spyware had attempted to hack Rori Donaghy, at the time a reporter for Middle East Eye.

The hack of a UK news website could spark more debate in the country about government hacking and spyware. Last week, [ten parliament members in the UK wrote a letter addressed to Prime Minister Boris Johnson](#) urging him and his government to suspend "spyware licenses and cybersecurity contracts to Gulf nations implicated in cyberattacks in the UK, namely the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain."

	The parliament members argued that this is a necessary step in light of the US Government putting NSO Group and Candiru on a denylist that bars any US company from selling services or software to those companies.
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HEADLINE	11/16 Robinhood hack included phone numbers
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3vddm/robinhood-hack-included-thousands-of-phone-numbers
GIST	<p>The recent hack at app-based investment platform Robinhood also impacted thousands of phone numbers, Motherboard has learned.</p> <p>The news provides more clarity on the nature of the data breach. Originally, Robinhood said that the breach included the email addresses of 5 million customers, the full names of 2 million customers, and other data from a smaller group of users.</p> <p>Motherboard obtained a copy of the stolen phone numbers from a source who presented themselves as a proxy for the hackers. The file includes around 4,400 phone numbers.</p> <p>When asked if the numbers belonged to Robinhood customers, the company told Motherboard in a statement that “We’ve determined that several thousand entries in the list contain phone numbers, and the list also contains other text entries that we’re continuing to analyze.”</p> <p>“We continue to believe that the list did not contain Social Security numbers, bank account numbers, or debit card numbers and that there has been no financial loss to any customers as a result of the incident. We’ll continue making appropriate disclosures to affected people,” the statement added. Robinhood said it plans to update its blog post about the breach with the new information about the phone numbers.</p> <p>Robinhood is an app that markets itself as letting more people enter the world of investing without paying fees up front. It entered the spotlight earlier this year during the rush of retail investing in meme stocks such as GameStop. At the time, Robinhood blocked purchases of certain stocks and became the subject of investigations by the SEC and other entities, including the Department of Justice.</p> <p>Last week, Motherboard reported that the hackers managed to gain access to an internal tool which offered the ability to remove security features from specific Robinhood user accounts. Robinhood said that based on its investigation, the hackers did not make changes to any customer accounts, however.</p> <p>Phone numbers are particularly valuable to hackers because services often use SMS for multi-factor authentication. If a hacker can take control of a victim’s number they may be able to reroute login verification codes to themselves. Or, armed with a phone number, a hacker can send phishing messages or calls to the target to try and obtain their verification codes. Earlier this month, Motherboard reported on the booming underground trade of bots that streamline the process of social engineering targets via automated phone calls.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 US to sell \$56M in seized crypto-currency
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-sell-56-million-in-cryptocurrency-seized-in-bitconnect-fraud-scheme-11637108121?mod=hp_minor_pos11
GIST	<p>A judge agreed to a request from U.S. authorities to liquidate roughly \$56 million in proceeds seized from a U.S. promoter of offshore company BitConnect, which allegedly conducted one of the biggest scams ever involving cryptocurrencies.</p> <p>The seizure was the largest single recovery from a cryptocurrency fraud in the U.S. to date, according to the Justice Department.</p>

U.S. District Judge Todd W. Robinson agreed to the request from the U.S. Justice Department and U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California last week to seize the proceeds from Glenn Arcaro, a U.S. promoter for BitConnect's cryptocurrency scheme. Mr. Arcaro consented to the seizure.

A lawyer for Mr. Arcaro declined to comment.

The Securities and Exchange Commission in September [sued BitConnect](#), accusing it and its founder, Satish Kumbhani, of a \$2 billion fraud that misused bitcoin raised from investors world-wide. That same month, Mr. Arcaro pleaded guilty in federal criminal court over his role in fleecing U.S. investors.

BitConnect sold its own digital asset in 2016 in exchange for bitcoin. The company told investors it had an automated program that would make money by trading the contributed bitcoin. Profits would be shared with investors through interest payments.

But BitConnect didn't use a program to trade bitcoin, according to the SEC. Instead, the regulator said, Mr. Kumbhani siphoned off some for himself and shared other amounts with promoters who helped him raise the money.

The government said it would start the process of restitution for those who fell victim to the BitConnect scheme by selling the cryptocurrency and holding the proceeds in U.S. dollars.

Mr. Arcaro, who is scheduled to be sentenced on Jan. 7, 2022, faces up to 20 years in prison, according to the Justice Department.

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HEADLINE	11/16 FBI: no slowdown from Russia cyberattacks
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/16/fbi-contradicts-biden-cyber-directors-claim-slowdo/
GIST	<p>A top FBI official said Tuesday that the bureau has not seen a decrease in cyberattacks coming from Russia, contradicting what President Biden's national cyber director recently told Congress.</p> <p>Bryan Vorndran, assistant director in FBI's cyber division, told lawmakers that the bureau has not witnessed a slowdown in ransomware attacks from Russia.</p> <p>"From an FBI perspective, we have not seen a decrease in ransomware attacks in the past couple of months originating from Russia," he said at a House Oversight Committee hearing. "Please understand we do have incomplete data. In a best-case scenario, we only see about 20% of the intrusions in the country, no different than our partners at [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency]."</p> <p>The testimony provided a stark contrast from National Cyber Director John C. Inglis who told lawmakers earlier this month that he had spotted a "discernible decrease" in such Russian cyberattacks.</p> <p>Mr. Inglis made an opposite claim before the House Homeland Security Committee earlier this month when asked by Rep. Elissa Slotkin, Michigan Democrat, about the level of attacks from Russian-based groups after Mr. Biden's summit in June with Russian President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>"I think that answering the question head-on, we have seen a discernible decrease," said Mr. Inglis at the hearing earlier this month. "It's too soon to tell whether that is because of the material efforts undertaken by the Russians or the Russian leadership. It may well be that the transgressors in this space have simply [laid] low understanding that this is, for the moment, a very hot time for them."</p> <p>Mr. Inglis, who testified alongside Mr. Vorndran at the hearing, did not directly address the discrepancy given the opportunity by Oversight Committee Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, New York Democrat. He said Russia plays an important role in stopping ransomware threats and America is not powerless without their help.</p>

	<p>“It is far more effective to stop these threats at their source. And a permissive environment, if harbored, if given safe haven by the Russians would encourage more entry into the space. That being said we’re not powerless,” said Mr. Inglis.</p> <p>The discrepancy may result from the two officials having access to different information or different analysis of the data available to them. Mr. Inglis noted in written remarks to the Oversight Committee that the White House and the Kremlin Experts Group are pressing Russia to act against criminal ransomware activities.</p> <p>A White House official told reporters in October that Mr. Biden and Mr. Putin created the experts group and it was sharing information on ransomware attacks with Russia. The White House is leading the experts group, according to the official.</p> <p>The FBI also has access to information about the ransomware attackers’ identity that it does not wish to make public. Asked at Tuesday’s hearing about foreign intelligence services posing as criminals to conduct ransomware attacks, Mr. Vorndran said a full answer would need to be given in a classified setting.</p> <p>“There are some intelligence gaps about whether intel service individuals are moonlighting as criminals or state actors are hiring criminals to conduct certain activities,” said Mr. Vorndran.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Cryptomixers used to clean ransoms
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/these-are-the-cryptomixers-hackers-use-to-clean-their-ransoms/
GIST	<p>Cryptomixers have always been at the epicenter of cybercrime activity, allowing hackers to "clean" cryptocurrency stolen from victims and making it hard for law enforcement to track them.</p> <p>When threat actors steal cryptocurrency or receive it as a ransom payment, law enforcement or researchers can see what cryptocurrency wallet the funds were sent to.</p> <p>Mixers allow threat actors to deposit illicitly obtained cryptocurrency and then mix it in a large pool of "random" transactions.</p> <p>This way, the original crypto gets muddled in a large collection of sums from many different and unknown sources.</p> <p>When done, the "cleaned" crypto is sent to a different address owned by the threat actors that have not been used before and is unknown to law enforcement. For the use of this service, the cryptomixers take a commission (usually 1-3%) from the mixed cryptocurrency.</p> <p>There's a dedicated area of research around the tracing of illicit cryptocurrency transactions, so mixing services need to use secret and robust mixing algorithms, or law enforcement could trace the funds.</p> <p>Also, these services have to avoid keeping any logs or any piece of information that could help identify users and link them to their assets.</p> <p>Researchers at Intel471 have explored the cybercrime underground to find which platforms are thought to be the most reliable in eradicating the transactions' trace, and they found four notable examples.</p> <p>Today’s mixing scene</p> <p>Today, hackers use four popular cryptomixing services, namely Absolutio, AudiA6, Blender, and Mix-btc. Except for Mix-btc, all platforms operate on the Tor network to ensure the anonymity and privacy of their users.</p>

They support Bitcoin, Bitcoin Cash, Dash, Ethereum, Ethereum Classic, Litecoin, Monero, and Tether. Mixers charge either a flat fee or a dynamic fee for using their services. Intel471 explains that "dynamic fee."

"Some services allow users to choose a "dynamic" service fee, which is most likely done to complicate investigations into illicit cryptocurrency funds by altering the amount being laundered at different stages of the process, making it more difficult to tie the funds to a specific crime or individual," explains [the report](#) by Intel471.

The different fees offered by each of the four mixers are below:

- Absolutio: 1% to 30% (dynamic)
- AudiA6: 3% to 5.5% (flat)
- Blender: 0.6% to 2.5% (dynamic)
- Mix-btc: 3% to 5.5% (flat)

Absolutio also offers time-delay options to help introduce variations that will help strengthen the anonymization. Also, it promises to wipe all request data after two days.

The service claims that all the coins come from allowed addresses and reputable exchanges and that users won't get crypto from "shady" sources.

A gray area

Analysts at Intel471 were able to find a wallet that belongs to Blender and report that between June 2020 and July 2020, it handled cryptocurrency transactions worth \$3,400,000.

This indicates the business size of these platforms, which operate in [a gray legal area](#), making tens of thousands of dollars per month, mostly coming from cybercrime activities.

Cryptocurrency mixing isn't intrinsically illegal and is commonly promoted as a privacy-boosting method. However, if a mixer is knowingly assisting illegal operations in laundering their illicit proceeds, law enforcement will target them and shut down their operations.

In the past, law enforcement operations [shut down the Helix bitcoin mixer](#) for laundering hundreds of millions of dollars of illicit narcotics proceeds. Similarly, the [Dutch police seized the BestMixer.io domain](#) after building a case that threat actors used the mixer to launder at least \$200 million bitcoin for cybercriminals.

Intel471 also says that some ransomware groups integrated cryptocurrency mixing services directly in their administrative panels.

"The developers behind Avaddon, DarkSide 2.0 (also known as BlackMatter) and REvil likely integrated the BitMix cryptocurrency mixer to facilitate the laundering of ransom payments for program affiliates," reads the report by Intel471.

As mixers are known to be used by illegal operations, they will continue to be targeted by law enforcement and possibly US sanctions, as we saw with the [Chatex](#) and [Suex](#) exchanges.

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HEADLINE	11/16 GitHub: major npm security defect
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/github-confirms-another-major-npm-security-defect
GIST	Microsoft-owned GitHub is again flagging major security problems in the npm registry, warning that a pair of newly discovered vulnerabilities continue to expose the soft underbelly of the open-source software supply chain.

The first major bug, reported via GitHub's bug bounty program on November 2, basically lets an attacker publish new versions of any npm package using an account without proper authorization.

"We determined that this vulnerability was due to inconsistent authorization checks and validation of data across several microservices that handle requests to the npm registry. In this architecture, the authorization service was properly validating user authorization to packages based on data passed in request URL paths. However, the service that performs underlying updates to the registry data determines which package to publish based on the contents of the uploaded package file," according to a note from GitHub security chief Mike Hanley.

Hanley said the discrepancy provided an avenue by which requests to publish new versions of a package would be authorized for one package but would actually be performed for a different, and potentially unauthorized, package. "We mitigated this issue by ensuring consistency across both the publishing service and authorization service to ensure that the same package is being used for both authorization and publishing," he added.

GitHub said it fixed the underlying issue within six hours, but the company cannot be sure the flaw was never exploited in the wild.

"This vulnerability existed in the npm registry beyond the timeframe for which we have telemetry to determine whether it has ever been exploited maliciously," Hanley said.

However, he said GitHub's security response team is highly confident that this specific vulnerability "has not been exploited maliciously during the timeframe for which we have available telemetry, which goes back to September 2020."

Separately, on October 26, Hanley said GitHub's security team identified an issue caused by routine maintenance of one of the project's publicly available npm services.

From the [GitHub advisory](#):

During maintenance on the database that powers the public npm replica at [replicate.npmjs.com](#), records were created that could expose the names of private packages. This briefly allowed consumers of [replicate.npmjs.com](#) to potentially identify the names of private packages due to records published in the public changes feed. No other information, including the content of these private packages, was accessible at any time.

Package names in the format of @owner/package for private packages created prior to October 20 were exposed between October 21 13:12:10Z UTC and October 29 15:51:00Z UTC. Upon discovery of the issue, we immediately began work on implementing a fix and determining the scope of the exposure. On October 29, all records containing private package names were removed from the replication database.

While these records were removed from the [replicate.npmjs.com](#) service on this date, the data on this service is consumed by third-parties who may have replicated the data elsewhere. To prevent this issue from occurring again, we have made changes to how we provision this public replication database to ensure records containing private package names are not generated during this process.

GitHub's latest warning comes on the heels of two separate npm package manager compromises over the last month. In early November, GitHub confirmed that two popular npm package managers -- [the Coa parser](#) and the [rc configuration loader](#) -- were compromised and rigged with password-stealing malware.

In late October, crypto-mining and password-stealing [malware were found embedded in ua-parser-js](#), an npm package (JavaScript library) that counts close to 8 million downloads per week.

The npm hacks raised eyebrows because of the software supply chain implications and prompted an extremely urgent warning from GitHub that any computer with the embedded npm package "should be considered fully compromised."

	<p>GitHub's Hanley said the company is ramping up its investments in securing the npm registry, including plans to require two-factor authentication (2FA) during authentication for maintainers and admins of popular packages on npm, starting with a list of top packages in the first quarter of 2022.</p> <p>"We are currently evaluating next steps to ensure that the strongest and most user-friendly authentication options, such as WebAuthn, are available and accessible to developers using npm," Hanley added.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 'Fake ransomware' hits WordPress sites
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/hundreds-of-wordpress-sites-defaced-in-fake-ransomware-attacks/
GIST	<p>Hundreds of WordPress sites have been defaced over the weekend with a message claiming that the site's data was encrypted in what security firm Sucuri has described as "fake ransomware."</p> <p>In a copy of the message—including above—the attackers request 0.1 bitcoins (~\$6,100) to unlock the affected websites.</p> <p>So far, the campaign has hit at least 300 sites, according to a Google search result for the text included in the ransom note.</p> <p>But at a closer look, the ransom message only appears on a few selected pages of a site's domain and not the entire website, which explains why nobody has paid the ransom demand so far.</p> <p>Furthermore, pages that were cached in Google search results as impacted appear to have been cleaned in the meantime, suggesting site owners had no difficulty in restoring their sites.</p> <p>Examinations carried out by <i>The Record</i> on sites that are still showing the message also found no signs of any form of encryption or error that would prevent users from using the rest of the website.</p> <p>Based on the current evidence, the attack appears to be a form of "scareware" meant to frighten non-technical website owners into paying the ransom demand, but one that has failed thus far.</p> <p>But even if the scenario that the attackers would have managed to encrypt a site's data, ransomware attacks against websites have rarely succeeded in the past. This is because most site owners have the ability to restore their sites from backups, replacing the encrypted files with clean versions with the push of a button from the web hosting control panels.</p> <p>Past incidents where ransomware was leveraged against websites but eventually failed include cases such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linux.Encoder.1 – the first known Linux-based ransomware targeted web servers back in November 2015. • CTB-Locker (web version) – targeted PHP sites in February 2016. • KimcilWare – targeted Magento online stores in March 2016. • Unnamed ransomware – targeted Drupal sites using an SQL injection vulnerability in May 2016. • Heimdall – code released on GitHub was abused to ransom PHP sites in November 2016. • EV Ransomware – targeted WordPress sites in August 2017.
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HEADLINE	11/17 Businesses worry: holiday cyberattacks
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cyber-security-cybersecurity-ransomware-hacking-businesses-worry-holidays/
GIST	<p><i>Washington</i> — After a year of headline-grabbing ransomware attacks, businesses say they're worried about the possibility they'll face cyber intrusions this holiday season, a time when many of their cybersecurity operations rely on skeleton staffing.</p>

Boston-based cybersecurity firm Cybereason commissioned a survey of 1,206 cybersecurity professionals at organizations that experienced a ransomware attack during a holiday or weekend within the last year. A whopping 89% of the respondents from the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, and UAE indicated that they were concerned about a repeat cyber intrusion ahead of the holiday season. However, 36% said they had no "specific contingency plan in place to mount a response."

"The question becomes, at what point does this concern from cyber professionals translate into an action plan?" Cybereason CEO Lior Div told CBS News. "Do organizations have the right tools, processes and people in place to deal with an attack specifically in the upcoming holiday season? Hackers love to hack when they know we're distracted and not ready to respond."

The study revealed that organizations in the healthcare (65%) and manufacturing (67%) sectors — two of the biggest targets for ransomware attacks — were among the industries least likely to have developed contingency plans.

[Cybercriminals have expanded hacking operations](#) to repeatedly target the healthcare industry amid the coronavirus pandemic, [leading to worsened health outcomes and excess deaths at hospitals](#).

Ahead of Labor Day weekend, the FBI and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [published a joint advisory warning](#) of an "increase in highly impactful ransomware attacks occurring on holidays and weekends — when offices are normally closed — in the United States," following a string of high-profile cyber incidents over long weekends.

Days later, Howard University in Washington, D.C. was forced to cancel classes for more than a week after malicious actors held its network hostage. The July 4 holiday weekend saw [one of the single largest ransomware attacks to date](#), when an affiliate of the "REvil" cyber gang targeted software company Kaseya just six weeks after the Russian-linked cyber criminals sabotaged meat processor JBS over Memorial Day weekend, [extorting the company for an \\$11 million ransom](#).

Colonial Pipeline paid a \$4.4 million in ransom to the DarkSide group after being forced to shut down its operations during Mother's Day weekend, though the FBI later recovered [\\$2.3 million of the ransom from the Russia-based hacking group](#).

The new report by Cybereason revealed the human cost of such attacks, with 86% of respondents missing holidays or weekend activities with family and friends to return to work in the wake of a cyber incident. Nearly three-quarters surveyed admitted they were intoxicated while responding to a ransomware attack on the weekend or during a holiday, "a risk factor for organizations that may not have been accounted for by incident response and business continuity plans," according to the report.

And the vulnerability of these organizations is further exacerbated by holes in the workforce. In the United States, there are [nearly 500,000 vacancies](#) for cybersecurity jobs, [according](#) to Cyber Seek — a tech job-tracking database from the U.S. Commerce Department — and the trade group CompTIA.

Ransomware payments reached over \$400 million in 2020, the FBI reported. And this year, the average ransom payment is up more than 500% over 2020, amounting to \$5.3 million, according to Cybereason.

In June, President Biden demanded that Russian President Vladimir Putin put an end to cybercriminal operations using Russia as a safe harbor. But attacks have persisted despite ["too soon to tell"](#) and [diplomatic efforts](#) aimed at curtailing Russia-linked ransomware operations.

"From the beginning of this year, we've seen a massive push in cyber intrusions, specifically originating from the ransomware cartel in Russia, starting all the way from Colonial Pipeline to the JBS hack," Dior told CBS News. "We thought that after President Biden met with President Putin, we'd see a decrease in those types of attacks. But actually, what we see is a steady stream of these types of hacks. The ransomware cartel did not stop for even a single moment."

In early November, the country's top military cyber officer, Army General Paul Nakasone, said it was ["too soon to tell"](#) if the Kremlin had facilitated the international hunt for cybercriminals after the United States handed over names of wanted suspects.

"From an FBI perspective, we have not seen a decrease in ransomware attacks in the past couple of months originating from Russia," Bryan Vorndran, assistant director of the FBI's cyber division, [told Congress on Tuesday](#).

Tiny cybersecurity mistakes by companies or organizations can cause massive damage.

A congressional investigation into three major ransomware events in 2021 noted that "small lapses led to major breaches." The [report, released on Tuesday](#) by the House Oversight Committee, indicated that "Ransomware attackers took advantage of relatively minor security lapses, such as a single user account controlled by a weak password, to launch enormously costly attacks."

"Even large organizations with seemingly robust security systems fell victim to simple initial attacks," the report continued, "highlighting the need to increase security education and take other security measures prior to an attack."

In its own report, Cybereason offered companies and organizations advice aimed at reducing risk this holiday season.

"Practicing good security hygiene," "lock down critical accounts for the holidays or weekend," and "assure key players can be reached at any time of day," were among the laundry list of precautions suggested. "Cyber defenders are heroes," Div added. "We need to ensure that companies and organizations are providing them with the right tools and support to do their job right."

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HEADLINE	11/16 FBI hack just an elaborate troll of 'Vinny'?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/was-fbi-email-hack-just-an-elaborate-troll-of-a-guy-named-vinny-troia?ref=home
GIST	<p>To hack an FBI email system, it takes a lot of motivation, even more technical skill, and, perhaps, a dash of humor.</p> <p>Over the weekend, someone—or a team of someones—compromised an FBI email system and sent out a flurry of bogus messages to state and local law enforcement about a supposed cyberattack. But instead of trying to wreak havoc, the purpose of the hack seems to have been to troll one particular information security executive: Vinny Troia, the founder and head of security research at Shadowbyte.</p> <p>At least, that's Troia's version.</p> <p>The tale turns out to involve a number of mysterious characters, including Troia, a hacking collective that's been going after the likes of Netflix and Montana schools, and someone that goes by the online alias of "Pompompurin."</p> <p>As of Wednesday, the FBI hadn't confirmed Troia's suspicions about why he was named in the email, and it didn't respond to a request for comment for this story. What isn't disputed, however, is that someone accessed an FBI email system and sent a message pinning a cyberattack that didn't happen on Troia.</p> <p>"We identified the threat actor to be Vinny Troia, whom [sic] is believed to be affiliated with the extortion gang TheDarkOverlord. We highly recommend you to check your systems," the hacker wrote in the duped messages. "Stay safe."</p>

TheDarkOverlord, an extortion-focused hacking collective, has run hacking schemes that have garnered headlines around the nation in recent years—the collective is behind the attack against [Netflix](#) in 2017, when it leaked *Orange Is the New Black* episodes before airing. It's the same collective that has been hitting [health care](#) organizations for years, and a group by the name TheDarkOverlord Solutions, suspected to be the same collective, which ran an extortion scheme against schools in [Montana](#), while issuing a healthy dose of [death threats](#) and ominous references to school shootings.

Troia, whose company recently rebranded to Shadowbyte from Night Lion Security, published a [report](#) in July 2020 detailing what he claims are the identities of the members and puppeteers of TheDarkOverlord hacking collective. And he told The Daily Beast that he believes the hacker behind the fake FBI email is somehow linked with TheDarkOverlord. His theory is they named him in the message as revenge for exposing members of their collective.

For now, Troia's story remains unconfirmed. He published a blog post about his suspicions Tuesday that does not confirm with certainty who was behind the attack.

But Troia has been known to [fudge the reality](#) of events in previous hacking incidents. In a recent [publication](#), Troia admitted he staged a hack against his own site, and then bragged about it on a cybercrime forum, ostensibly to see which criminals clamored for more. He has also attempted to sell leaked data on a cybercrime forum, only to claim he later didn't really intend to sell it, according to investigative reporter [Brian Krebs](#).

This time, however, there appears to be some credence to Troia's story about the FBI hack.

For one, Krebs reports that a hacker that goes by the alias "Pompompurin" told him in an interview this week that they were behind the FBI compromise and the fake emails. The hacker claimed they discovered a poorly set up email system and then sent the messages to spread awareness about the misconfiguration so the FBI could fix it.

It's unclear who runs the Pompompurin alias—Pompompurin did not return a request for comment—but Troia does have a long-standing rivalry with this Pompompurin.

Troia and the alias send barbs back and forth over Twitter with frequency. [Troia](#) says Pompompurin has accused Troia of being a pedophile. And Troia has claimed Pompompurin previously hacked his Twitter account to send out explicit, sexual messages to his contacts.

Just for the Lulz

Regardless of who took over the FBI email system briefly this weekend, the entire incident has left cybersecurity pros and law enforcement officials scratching their heads at why whoever is behind the incident didn't take advantage of their access to the FBI email to issue more damaging fake messages.

For instance, they could have laced the legitimate-looking emails with malware or malicious attachments that could have compromised the FBI's trusted partners. And yet, the emails didn't appear to contain any malware, and were likely not aimed at this kind of broader hacking campaign, according to Spamhaus, a non-profit that tracks spam and digital threats. Instead, the hacker or hackers behind this operation appeared to just be messing around, Carel Bitter, the head of data at Spamhaus, told The Daily Beast.

"There are far, far worse things you could do than this. If you have this, you say, 'I'm just going to have fun with it?' That's just a big middle finger," said Bitter, whose group first caught onto the bogus message flurry. "They made the FBI look bad. Using something like that for something that's sort of a joke like this is quite brazen."

The fact that the hacker or hackers didn't lace any malware or malicious attachments in the messages indicates they could have just stumbled across the misconfiguration and decided to take advantage to gain a name for themselves in the underground forums, where showing you're capable of hitting high-value

	<p>targets earns street cred, said Austin Berglas, the former chief of the FBI's New York Office Cyber Branch.</p> <p>In Berglas' telling, the hackers could be looking to say, "'Hey guys we're the group responsible for compromising the FBI unclass email,' and use that to elevate their status on the forums."</p> <p>"It would have been very, very easy for someone to load up that email that went out with malicious attachments and own hundreds of thousands of additional accounts," Berglas added.</p> <p>But the move—hacking for shits, giggles, and maybe personal vendettas—is a bit unusual these days. The age of cybercriminals just hacking to play pranks has been on a bit of a downturn in recent years.</p> <p>"I think the 'lols' and the jokey, doxxing type has really reduced also because a lot of the splinter cells and the collectives... have not been as proliferating," added Berglas, who investigated one of the most prominent groups, Lulzsec, which hacked websites to embarrass them.</p> <p>Making a big show of it is one way for the hacker or hackers behind the operation "to say, 'look I exploited weak code in the portal, I got in there and I didn't use it to its fullest capacity. I just used it as a way to send out a silly message. And oh, by the way, that's because I can get into anything,'" Berglas told The Daily Beast. "Hackers do that... just to show they can."</p> <p>The FBI, for its part, did issue a statement over the weekend about the breach, noting it was "aware of a software misconfiguration that temporarily allowed an actor to... send fake emails."</p> <p>"Once we learned of the incident we quickly remediated the software vulnerability, warned partners to disregard the fake emails, and confirmed the integrity of our networks," the FBI said.</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	11/17 France: 2 arrests; anti-terrorism probe
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/two-people-linked-frances-far-right-arrested-anti-terror-probe-report-2021-11-17/
GIST	<p>PARIS, Nov 17 (Reuters) - Two people linked to France's ultra-right movement have been arrested by agents from the DGSI intelligence service as part of an anti-terrorism probe, a judicial source said on Wednesday.</p> <p>France Info earlier reported that the two were suspected of issuing a call for violence via the Telegram messaging app.</p> <p>Weapons were found at the home of one of the two suspects, the judicial source told Reuters.</p> <p>Material related to the making of explosives had also been found, French news agency AFP reported. Both suspects, who were seized by police on Tuesday, are from southwestern France, France Info and AFP said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Taliban officials: explosions hit Kabul
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/two-blasts-hit-afghan-capital-kabul-officials-say-2021-11-17/
GIST	<p>KABUL, Nov 17 (Reuters) - Two explosions hit the Afghan capital Kabul on Wednesday, killing at least one person and wounding at least six others, including three women, Taliban officials and local residents said.</p>

	<p>One car bomb blast in Dasht-e Barchi, a heavily Shi'ite Muslim area of western Kabul, killed a civilian and wounded six others, interior ministry spokesman Qari Sayeed Khosty said in a tweet.</p> <p>A second explosion was also reported in the Karte 3 area, local residents said. A Taliban official said security forces were still gathering information.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Islamic extremist violence in Burkina Faso
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/africa-islamic-state-group-burkina-faso-missing-persons-80ffd2f58e9bd11c94db316da45f5014
GIST	<p>FADA N'GOURMA, Burkina Faso (AP) — The last time Polenli Combary spoke to her son on the phone she prayed for God to bless him. Shortly after, she called back but the line was dead.</p> <p>Her 34-year-old son was returning a truck used to move the family's belongings from their village in eastern Burkina Faso after jihadis forced everyone to leave. He disappeared in March.</p> <p>"We will keep searching ... I'm just praying to God to have him back," said Combary, 53, sitting despondently in the eastern city of Fada N'Gourma where she now lives.</p> <p>Islamic extremist violence is ravaging Burkina Faso, killing thousands and displacing more than 1 million people.</p> <p>And people are going missing. Reports of missing relatives quadrupled from 104 to 407 between 2019 and 2020, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which defines a missing person as someone whose whereabouts cannot be accounted for and requires state intervention.</p> <p>"With the conflict, you have more sudden movements of people, you have more incidents which can lead to separation and disappearance," said Marina Fakhouri, head of protection with the ICRC in Burkina Faso. "Certainly we are concerned also by the number of families who are coming to us directly to signal that they have a missing relative and need support."</p> <p>People have previously gone missing in the West African nation due to migration, floods or shocks from climate change, but the magnitude has increased because of the violence, she said.</p> <p>Tracing people during a conflict and in a context of mass displacement is challenging, can cause tensions within families and communities and psychological and physical distress. One month after her son disappeared, Combary's husband died of a heart attack due to the shock, she said.</p> <p>While some families blame the jihadis for the disappearances of their loved ones, many others point to the security forces as the main perpetrators. During a trip to Fada N'Gourma in October and speaking to people in the Sahel province by phone, three families, including Combary's, told The Associated Press they suspect the army is responsible for their missing relatives.</p> <p>The military has been accused by rights groups of extrajudicial killings and targeting people deemed to be associated with the jihadis. About 70% of families reporting people missing allege it is linked to the security forces, said Daouda Diallo, executive secretary for the Collective Against Impunity and Stigmatization of Communities, a civil society group.</p> <p>There's been a reduction of reported cases affiliated with the military since the end of last year, which Diallo attributes to a report by Human Rights Watch that accused the army of being involved in mass killings, said Diallo. But now the abuses are being committed by volunteer fighters, civilians armed by the state, he said.</p> <p>"It is sad to see that the violence has been subcontracted to armed civilians or militia in the field," Diallo said.</p>

The ministry of defense did not respond to requests for comment.

Burkina Faso's increasing violence fuels impunity among the security forces and the abductions and killings highlight the absence of the rule of law, conflict analysts say.

"A significant proportion of the violence is attributed either to jihadist groups or 'unidentified armed men' making it easy to absolve certain parties of responsibility. It's easy to kill people or make them disappear, but much more difficult to protect them," said Heni Nsaibia, senior researcher at the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Families searching for relatives they believe were taken by state agents say they don't know where to turn. Hamadou Diallo's nephew was allegedly arrested by the army outside Dori town in the Sahel province in 2019, he said. Unaware of any organization that could help other than the military, Diallo stopped searching.

"Nobody had the courage to approach (the army)," he said. "After one or two weeks, if you don't see a family member, that means (they're dead)."

Rights groups say the government is obligated to investigate all cases of disappearance, hold people responsible and use the judiciary and the national human rights commission, said Corinne Dufka, West Africa director for Human Rights Watch.

"Both institutions need to redouble their efforts on behalf of families whose loved ones went missing at the hands of state security forces or armed Islamists. They have a right to the truth and to justice," she said.

But while families with missing relatives search for answers, they live in limbo.

Fidele Ouali hasn't seen his 33-year-old brother since he disappeared a year and a half ago, he said. A farmer and father of five, Ouali said he was close to his brother, but as time passes, he's finding it harder to remember him.

"All my memories are wiped out," said Ouali. Clutching his brother's birth certificate which he carries everywhere, Ouali said he is torn between giving up completely and hanging onto the hope that one day he might see his brother again.

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HEADLINE	11/16 UK: self-radicalized 'lone wolf' terrorists
SOURCE	https://inews.co.uk/news/lone-wolf-terrorists-self-radicalised-online-during-covid-pandemic-increasing-concern-1304430
GIST	<p>MPs and charities are increasingly concerned that the pandemic may have "exacerbated" the number of so-called 'lone wolf' terrorists being radicalised online, as the UK tightens security measures following two terrorist incidents in the past month.</p> <p>Security Minister Damian Hinds said on Tuesday there has been a shift change in the UK from "complex operation[s] through to more individual, self-initiated, self-radicalised" attacks.</p> <p>He told <i>Sky News</i> that the Government is now keeping a closer eye on potential "lone wolf" terrorists.</p> <p>It comes as counter-terrorism police scramble to identify a motive behind the terror incident in Liverpool last Sunday. A suspected suicide bomber died in a taxi explosion outside the Liverpool Women's Hospital at the same time that Remembrance Sunday events were taking place nearby.</p> <p>Police have named the suspect, who was declared dead at the scene, as Emad al-Swealmeen, 32, though there is currently no evidence to suggest that he was radicalised online.</p>

But experts are concerned that a lack of face-to-face interaction during the pandemic may have caused some people at risk of being radicalised to slip through the net during the country's various lockdowns.

A lot of radical ideology starts out as conspiracist thinking, which then spreads out of control, according to Patrik Hermansson, a researcher at anti-fascist advocacy group Hope Not Hate.

"It's hard to prove in terms of numbers, but we saw a lot of worrying signs during lockdown of people being more vocal about conspiracy theories than before — a lot of them starting with theories around the Covid vaccines," he told i.

"The issue with conspiracy theories is that you have to believe in a malicious intent by some sort of actor, and then you start looking out for who that actor might be."

Conspiracy theories traditionally have roots in anti-semitic ideas about "Jewish influence", Mr Hermansson added, but they have recently spread to hateful thinking about other demographics.

"We have seen an increasing trend in radicalist thinking from across the spectrum, including the racist right, all the way to kind of Nazis," he said.

And a lack of support networks and interaction with the outside world may have led some people down the rabbit hole during lockdown, Mr Hermansson added.

"The second thing is exclusion — time spent online by oneself without interactions with other people. We've seen far right groups run by very young kids. There is an element there where young people weren't at school during the pandemic, they spent most of their time in front of a screen, often by themselves. It meant teachers couldn't pick up on the normal signs," Mr Hermansson told i.

"Teachers pick up on things — we have looked at kids having been referred to Prevent and similar organisations, and there's definitely a worry that that just won't happen now in the same way."

The UK's security threat level was raised from 'substantial' to 'severe' on Monday, meaning another attack is now "highly likely" to occur on British soil.

Home Secretary Priti Patel noted that Sunday's attack marked the UK's second terror incident in a month, following the murder of Conservative MP Sir David Amess last month.

Ali Harbi Ali, 25, has been charged with Sir David's murder and the preparation of terrorist acts.

According to the Government's own website, "there was a stark decrease in anti-radicalisation referrals to Prevent... [the deradicalisation scheme] throughout the numerous lockdowns during the last 12 months".

In the year up to March 2020, the UK saw a record number of people referred to the anti-radicalisation programme, with 6,000 people transferred.

Official statistics on Prevent referrals during the pandemic are due to be published on Thursday, but initial reports have suggested that overall referral numbers may have dropped as much as 50 per cent.

It comes after a Government report into counter-extremism in the UK published in July last year noted that "hateful extremists have used the pandemic to engage in disinformation and fake news about minority groups which have been used by sympathisers to incite hatred, justify violence and to divide communities."

Justice Secretary Dominic Raab said last month that there was an increased risk of radicalisation among those who had spent the time "cocooned at home" in front of a computer.

“It is inherently difficult in a world that we find ourselves in, where you have lone wolf attackers, to have an entirely risk-free counterterrorism strategy,” he told Times Radio.

“It’s very difficult to do that in a free country, in a free and open market. So what we’ve got to do is make sure we learn the lessons to take proportionate action and adjust as the risk adapts and evolves.”

But not all organisations have seen a drop in self-radicalisation referrals during the pandemic.

Exit UK, a community organisation founded in 2017, offers support to people who have become embroiled with the far right.

The organisation, which is made up of former members of the far right, told i that it has seen a 320 per cent increase in people seeking its services between April 2020 and April 2021.

The group benefited from a share of a £400m funding package announced by London Mayor Sadiq Khan in September to support local efforts to fight against hate, extremism and radicalisation in the capital.

Speaking at the time, Nigel Bromage, Managing Director of Exit UK, said: “The hard work and resilience of our local communities, businesses and organisations were crucial in helping us overcome the significant challenges of the past few months.

“At the same time we know extremism and intolerance has not gone away and there are many who are intent on using the current situation, with all the uncertainties and conspiracy theories the pandemic brought, to sow division and hate within our communities.”

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HEADLINE	11/17 Inquiry: ISIS app ignored by governments
SOURCE	http://www.mcivortimes.com.au/national/2021/11/17/5700120/isis-app-ignored-by-governments-inquiry
GIST	<p>No government was interested in taking down a messaging app where 80 per cent of users were affiliated with the Islamic State, a Senate inquiry heard.</p> <p>Tech Against Terrorism director Adam Hadley said smaller platforms and social media services are where extremists moved to after being shut down by giants like Facebook and Twitter.</p> <p>"It is like small platforms do not exist," he told a committee reviewing Australian laws that force publishers to remove abhorrent violent material as soon as they become aware of it.</p> <p>"They are the threat ... (but) smaller platforms ... do not appear to be considered.</p> <p>"So our frustration here is whilst it is right and proper to apply pressure on the larger platforms, it is not acceptable for terrorists and extremists to have any room to re-manoeuvre."</p> <p>Violent material spotted by internal artificial intelligence systems and taken down proactively amounted to 99.7 per cent of cases for Facebook and 96 per cent for Twitter.</p> <p>But smaller platforms do not have access to the resources tech giants do.</p> <p>This means that while a small amount of terrorist and extremist material makes it way onto Facebook and Twitter, some of these smaller apps are made up almost entirely of terrorist or extremist groups.</p> <p>Mr Hadley said he was aware of platforms where 70 to 90 per cent of users were terrorist affiliates.</p> <p>The inquiry also heard a lack of a clear definition of the abhorrent violent material publishers are forced to take down also risks limiting whistleblowing posts.</p>

Representatives of Facebook's parent company Meta and Twitter told the inquiry they supported regulation that forced the takedown of violent and extremist material but more clarity was needed.

Hastily taking down content could lead to the shutting down of "counter-speech", such as people condemning violent material and actions, or journalists, politicians and whistleblowers exposing atrocities.

Meta representatives said they were aware of an instance in the past year where a violent video at a mosque in southeast Asia was taken down by the company but turned out to be exposing violence against Muslims.

Public policy vice president Simon Milner said the company erred on the side of caution after initially believing it was footage of the Christchurch mosque attack and questioned whether there was enough time to make the correct decision.

"Does (the law) allow us to have time to think about it? Once we are aware of it we have to remove it immediately and that is a challenge for us if we want to deliberate," he told the committee.

Twitter Australia senior director Kathleen Reen said 73 per cent of the content on Twitter following the Christchurch attack was from verified accounts, most of which were operated by news organisations and journalists.

"One of the really big takeaways is (the need for) a reasonable process for consultation, for review and for appeal," she said.

"There could be contingencies ... around mass takedowns of content which could effectively block Australians having access to newsworthy content or from understanding what is going on."

Neither Twitter and Facebook had received any official takedown notices from Australian law enforcement agencies.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Iraq: 'dangerous' ISIS commander arrested
SOURCE	https://en.abna24.com/news//dangerous-isis-chieftain-arrested-in-iraq_1199273.html
GIST	<p>AhlulBayt News Agency (ABNA): Iraqi Military forces have arrested one of the dangerous ISIS chieftains in Nineva Province in the north of the country.</p> <p>According to Iraqi sources, intelligence forces of Iraq's Ministry of Defence arrested one of the dangerous ISIS commanders in an operation conducted in Nineveh in northern Iraq on Tuesday.</p> <p>A statement issued by Iraq's Ministry of Defence described the detained ISIS element as "dangerous" who was in charge of the military wing of the terrorist group. The statement added that earlier before his arrest, an arrest warrant of this ISIS member had been issued.</p> <p>The news today came after the Iraq Intelligence Service said in a statement on Monday that an ISIS commander was captured by Iraqi forces alive.</p> <p>This statement said that Iraqi army troops in cooperation with the counter-terrorism forces in Rutba city could identify and arrest a top chieftain of the ISIS terrorist group in Al Anbar governorate.</p> <p>This senior terrorist was in charge of transferring foodstuff and logistics to the ISIS terrorists in their hideouts in the western province.</p> <p>While Iraq declared victory in 2017 over the ISIS, the remnants of the terrorist group are still operating in some provinces across Iraq.</p>

	The Governorates of Diyala, Saladin, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Nineveh, and Al Anbar are the main areas in Iraq where ISIS movements and terrorist operations against military forces and civilians are taking place.
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HEADLINE	11/16 Judge rejects claim Omar Ameen a terrorist
SOURCE	https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article255874666.html
GIST	<p>A federal immigration judge in Van Nuys ruled Tuesday that Iraqi refugee Omar Ameen lied on his application forms seeking entry to the United States and can be removed from the country, but she said the government had not proven its claims that Ameen participated in terrorist activities.</p> <p>“The government has met its burden by clear and convincing evidence, which is the proper standard, and the court sustains allegation four that (Ameen) procured his admission by fraud or willfully misrepresented a material fact,” Judge Tara Naselow-Najas found.</p> <p>The judge found that Ameen misrepresented the facts of his father’s death — he claimed his father was killed by terrorists, while the government maintains he died of a heart attack — and also found that Ameen was not truthful when he said he had never interacted with any members of terror groups.</p> <p>The government had said his cousin and other family members had ties to such groups, and the judge said his cousin “was clearly a member” of such a group. But the judge said the government had not proven that Ameen had taken part in terrorist activities, a finding that gave his lawyers hope that he can remain in this country with his wife and children, who live in the Sacramento area.</p> <p>“The big takeaway — Omar is not a terrorist, as we’ve been saying for years,” Assistant Federal Defender Rachelle Barbour said after the hearing. “He’s not a kidnapper, a murderer, a highway robber, an IED maker, a financial emir, or any of the other wild allegations thrown his way. Omar has never participated in or helped any terrorist group.</p> <p>“The Immigration Judge definitively repudiated all of the false witnesses procured by the FBI. The FBI repeated these witnesses’ baseless claims that Omar had committed the most heinous acts — all of that was nonsense that our government has pursued for over three years.</p> <p>“I hope that now Omar will be released to continue the fight against removal to Iraq, a country where government actors have falsely accused him of those acts. Our own government has found that Iraq’s institutions are corrupt, and its courts and government agents engage in torture and extrajudicial killings.”</p> <p>Ameen was given the option in court of choosing where he might want to be sent if forced to leave, and he declined, leaving the government recommending Iraq, his native country, or Turkey, where he lived until 2014, when he came to the United States.</p> <p>The judge indicated she would recommend Iraq, a destination that his lawyers have fought against because they are convinced that is tantamount to a death sentence.</p> <p>“Omar has been directly threatened with an extrajudicial execution by Colonel Abdul Jabbar — an Iraqi militia leader,” Barbour said.</p> <p>“That Colonel told Vice News ‘I would drink Omar’s blood.’ He told my defense team that he would arrange for Omar’s execution upon Omar’s return. He arranged for the witnesses to falsely accuse Omar of terrorism, punishable by death if Omar is returned. Omar cannot be returned to Iraq, that is clear.”</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney’s Office in Sacramento, which sought to extradite Ameen, had no immediate comment Tuesday.</p> <p>How soon Ameen could be removed remains unclear.</p>

His immigration attorney, Siobhan Waldron, told the court that she plans to seek other remedies such as asylum or refugee status, and the next hearing in the case is set for Jan. 31.

Meanwhile, Waldron said she would pursue Ameen's release on bond, something the judge told her would require proving that he is not a flight risk or danger to the community. The FBI raided Ameen's Arden Arcade apartment in August 2018 after Iraqi authorities issued an extradition request accusing him of being a terrorist leader who killed a police officer in his hometown of Rawah in 2014.

Ameen and his attorneys denied the claims, but he was held in the Sacramento County Main Jail as prosecutors argued in federal court that he should be returned to face trial in Iraq, a fate that Ameen's attorneys said would lead to his certain execution.

Instead, a federal magistrate judge threw the case out in April 2021, saying prosecutors had failed to make their case. The judge ordered Ameen's immediate release, but federal immigration authorities took charge and removed him from the jail, driving him to a detention facility in Southern California where he faced his deportation proceedings via video conferencing.

Ameen's lawyers have insisted he had no ties to terror and could not have been in Rawah when the officer was killed, noting that he had lived in Turkey since 2012 and that cell phone records showed he never returned to Iraq. U.S. officials discounted the cellphone evidence and said Ameen should be deported because he lied on his U.S. immigration documents to gain entry to the United States in 2014.

His case has generated international media coverage, as well as pleas from Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg and City Council members that he be released.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Suspect named in Liverpool terror attack
SOURCE	https://news.sky.com/story/liverpool-terror-attack-who-was-suspected-terrorist-emad-al-swealmeen-and-what-do-we-know-so-far-12469900
GIST	<p>Emad al Swealmeen has been named as the suspected terrorist who was killed when a taxi he was in exploded outside a hospital in Liverpool for women and babies.</p> <p>The 32-year-old came to the UK from the Middle East several years ago and reportedly had an asylum claim rejected in 2014.</p> <p>He had also converted from Islam to Christianity.</p> <p>What do we know about al Swealmeen?</p> <p>Al Swealmeen was born in Iraq, according to police who have traced his next of kin.</p> <p>He had experienced "episodes of mental illness" before the attack took place. Assistant Chief Constable Russ Jackson, head of Counter Terrorism Policing North West, said.</p> <p>He added that al Swealmeen's mental health would "form part of the investigation".</p> <p>An unnamed source quoted by The Sun said one issue being explored is whether the suspected attacker was motivated by an "unresolved grievance" with the Home Office over a bid to become a UK resident in 2014.</p> <p>Malcolm Hitchcott, who with his wife Elizabeth had taken in al Swealmeen to their home, said he had first come to Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral in 2015 and wanted to convert to Christianity, which he did in 2017.</p> <p>He told The Sun: "He was destitute at that time and we took him in. The UK asylum people were never convinced he was Syrian and he was refused asylum in 2014.</p>

"He had his case rejected because he has been sectioned due to some mental health incident where he was waving a knife at people from an overpass."

Speaking to The Telegraph, Mr Hitchcott added: "He was very quiet but deeply moved by faith in Jesus. I used to pray every day for half an hour in the dining room with him. I don't think he was pretending about his faith."

The head of asylum seeker charity, Asylum Link, Ewan Roberts also told Sky News that the organisation helped him with his application for asylum.

Mr Roberts said al Swealmeen had an initial asylum request and an appeal refused after arriving in the UK in 2014, and the charity was assisting him before he got himself a solicitor

He added that "at some point" al Swealmeen stayed with "people from the church".

"What a lot of people won't be aware of is that when someone gets a refusal (when applying for asylum) the Home Office doesn't usually remove them, it just says you should sign up for a voluntary return programme and go home, you have to be out of your house in 21 days, you have no support and you are not allowed to work," he said.

"So suddenly you have got people who are just drifting and the Home Office doesn't know where they are, so surviving as a destitute asylum seeker is very difficult."

Al Swealmeen died after a homemade bomb exploded in a taxi outside Liverpool Women's Hospital shortly before 11am on Remembrance Sunday.

How has al Swealmeen been described?

The couple described al Swealmeen as artistic and a motor racing fan.

He was reported to have changed his name to Enzo after the racing driver Enzo Ferrari.

Mrs Hitchcott said the couple were "very" shocked by the news.

Speaking to the BBC, she said: "We're just so, so sad. We just loved him, he was a lovely guy."

Why did the attack happen?

A motive has not yet become clear but the bomb blast has been declared a terrorist attack.

MI5 is assisting police with the investigation.

Four men were arrested under terrorism laws in the Kensington area of Liverpool but have now been released from police custody after they were interviewed.

In an update on Wednesday, Assistant Chief Constable Russ Jackson said investigators had discovered that Al Swealmeen made "relevant purchases" for his attack as far back as April.

He said "a complex picture" was "emerging over the purchases of the component parts of the device".

"We know that Al Swealmeen rented the property from April this year, and we believe relevant purchases have been made at least since that time," he said a statement.

Mr Jackson said a post-mortem examination had confirmed his cause of death as "injuries sustained from the fire and explosion".

	<p>Who was the taxi driver?</p> <p>The taxi driver, named locally as David Perry, survived the blast on Sunday. He has since been discharged from hospital.</p> <p>His wife Rachel said it was "an utter miracle" and he is "lucky to be alive".</p> <p>In a Facebook post, she said her husband was "extremely sore and just trying to process what's happened".</p> <p>"The explosion happened whilst he was in the car and how he managed to escape is an utter miracle," she wrote.</p> <p>"He certainly had some guardian angels looking after him."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Germany: extremist motive in train attack?
SOURCE	https://www.darientimes.com/news/article/Germany-Islamic-extremist-motive-possible-in-16624643.php
GIST	<p>BERLIN (AP) — German prosecutors say they are no longer ruling out an Islamic extremist motive in a knife attack on a train earlier this month that left four people wounded.</p> <p>Prosecutors in Munich said Tuesday that Islamic State group propaganda videos had been found on the suspect and that material on the 27-year-old's Facebook account also points in that direction, news agency dpa reported.</p> <p>The attack took place on an IntercityExpress high-speed train traveling from Passau, on the Austrian border, to Hamburg on Nov. 6. Authorities have said previously that the man attacked his victims apparently at random and showed signs of mental illness, but that there was no immediate indication of a terror motive. The man was admitted to a psychiatric hospital.</p> <p>Police have said that the suspect, a Syrian citizen, came to Germany in 2014 and was granted asylum in 2016. He had been living in Passau.</p> <p>The train stopped at Seubersdorf, a station between the Bavarian cities of Regensburg and Nuremberg, after the attack and investigators said the suspect was arrested quickly and without resistance.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Extremists recruiting on social media
SOURCE	https://inews.co.uk/news/terrorist-recruiters-extremist-content-evade-moderation-instagram-youtube-1304006
GIST	<p>Extremists are constantly changing the language they use to evade moderation on social media sites like Instagram and YouTube as a 'vital' tool to recruit terrorists, an expert has said.</p> <p>Researcher of far-right extremism at anti-extremism watchdog HOPE not Hate Patrik Hermansson said some of the main techniques used by extremists are propaganda and direct messaging potential recruits.</p> <p>"They use YouTube and live streaming to promote their ideas and also so people can get in touch with them," he told i.</p> <p>"But then you have more specific groups, smaller groups who are action oriented and will actually plan to use violence. They actually reach out to people and send direct messages, asking them to join."</p> <p>He said extremist recruiters will set up accounts that promote certain ideals and then evade social media moderation by using coded language or being deliberately vague on their intentions.</p> <p>For example, extremists may deliberately misspell certain key words to avoid detection and moderation on social media platforms.</p>

“They always develop new ways of speaking,” Mr Hermansson said.

His remarks come after a taxi exploded outside the Liverpool Women’s Hospital on Remembrance Sunday. Police [declared it a terrorist attack](#) that they suspect was carried out by 32-year-old [Emad Al Swealmeen](#) who died in the explosion.

The UK’s terror threat level has been raised from “substantial” to “severe” in response, meaning an attack is now judged to be “highly likely”.

i found one YouTube profile for a Moroccan-born Islamist preacher listed on the Counter Extremism Project’s Extremist Database, who is said to have played a role in radicalising a suicide bomber through sermons at a Paris mosque.

But some terror suspects do work alone as “self-motivated” extremists, Dr Dan Lomas, lecturer in intelligence and security studies at Brunel University, told i.

Joe Whittaker is a Lecturer in cyber threats, criminology, sociology and social policy at Swansea University and told i extremist recruiting is “much more about trying to inspire lone actor or small cell terror attacks now, whereas in previous decades, people may have gone to a training camps abroad to join Al-Qaeda or even traveled to the caliphate to go and live in Islamic State.”

Since travel became much more difficult in the pandemic, “groups have worked to establish much smaller control links to try and inspire people to do things on their own,” he said.

A spokesperson for Meta, the owners of Facebook and Instagram, said: “We ban those engaged in terrorism or organised violence from our platforms, and remove content that praises, supports or represents these people or groups and their activities whenever we find it.

“We have a team of more than 350 counterterrorism specialists works with experts around the world to help make sure we’re keeping up with evolving trends and adversarial shifts in behaviour, both online and offline.

“Between July and September, we removed over 10 million pieces of terrorist content from Facebook and Instagram, over 99% of which we found using our technology before anyone reported it. We know terrorists are always adapting, which is why we’ll continue to do the same.”

YouTube removed 431,355 videos (6.9 per cent of total removals) and over 13,861 channels (0.3 per cent) for violating its policies on promotion of violence or violent extremism.

The platform said that out of every 10,000 views on the platform 19 to 21 came from violative content. It encourages users to flag material they believe is inappropriate and if it breaks guidelines and threatens violence, the platform will remove it.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Afghan opium production rises 5 th year
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/world/afghan-opium-production-rises-for-a-fifth-year-un-report-says/
GIST	<p>Afghanistan’s opium production crossed the 6,000-ton mark for the fifth straight year, according to a United Nations report, undermining efforts to stop the war-torn nation from being the hub of the global drug trade.</p> <p>The country has produced 6,800 tons in 2021, and the uncertainty resulting from the Taliban’s takeover of the country has pushed up opium prices in August and September. Output grew 8% this year and</p>

	<p>incentives for cultivation have risen as prices have picked up amid soaring poverty and food insecurity, according to the report.</p> <p>“The 2022 opium harvest will be based on decisions that farmers will make in November 2021, when they are starting to sow opium poppy,” the report, released Monday, added.</p> <p>Afghanistan is the world’s largest opium producer, accounting for some 87% of the global production, despite a \$9 billion, two-decade effort by the U.S. to deter illegal production of the drug in the country. The crop also makes up the largest share of illegal activity in the country where the economy has been long dependent on foreign aid and opium sales.</p> <p>“Income from opiates in Afghanistan amounted to some \$1.8-\$2.7 billion in 2021,” the report said. “However, much larger sums are accrued along illicit drug supply chains outside Afghanistan.”</p> <p>Opium comes from the sap in unripe poppy-seed pods. The sap dries into a brown latex that contains alkaloids which produce a host of narcotic and pharmaceutical drugs, including heroin, methamphetamine, morphine and codeine.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Uganda: ISIS ally behind deadly bombings
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ugandan-capital-kampala-hit-by-twin-explosions-11637054105?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>KAMPALA, Uganda—Suicide bombers set off two powerful explosions in the center of Uganda’s capital during Tuesday morning rush hour in what police said was a terrorist attack carried out by a local ally of Islamic State.</p> <p>At least three people were killed and 33 were injured in the twin attacks, which took place within about 550 yards and three minutes of each other in Kampala’s heavily guarded business district, said police spokesman Fred Enanga. Three suspected suicide bombers also died in the blasts.</p> <p>Police also shot and injured a fourth would-be suicide bomber in a suburb north of Kampala and during a search of the alleged attacker’s residence recovered a suicide vest and other bomb-making equipment, Mr. Enanga said.</p> <p>Police blamed the attack on the Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamist group that started an insurgency against Uganda’s president, Yoweri Museveni, in the 1990s and in 2017 pledged allegiance to Islamic State, or ISIS. ISIS leadership formally recognized the ADF as one of its affiliates in July 2019.</p> <p>The group usually operates from the jungles of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, but European security officials say it has recently become emboldened to launch high-profile attacks in Uganda and neighboring Rwanda after receiving sizable funding and technical assistance from ISIS’ central leadership.</p> <p>Uganda is a major contributor of troops to an African Union mission fighting an Islamist insurgency in Somalia and Rwanda recently sent its soldiers to battle another ISIS affiliate in Mozambique.</p> <p>“Our intelligence indicates that these are domestic terror attacks, linked to the ADF,” he said. “We believe there are still very many suicide attackers out there. The threat is being directed at all Ugandans.”</p> <p>Western security officials say the ADF is one of a number of local terrorist groups—including in majority-Christian countries such as Uganda—that ISIS has embraced since its caliphate collapsed in Syria and Iraq. In March, the U.S. State Department slapped sanctions on the ADF and its leaders after the group became one of ISIS’ deadliest franchises. Western officials say ISIS provides funding and training to the groups, but doesn’t direct their day-to-day operations.</p>

The explosions happened hours before U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was due to touch down in neighboring Kenya on his first official visit to sub-Saharan Africa.

At a news conference Tuesday, Ugandan police showed surveillance-camera footage from the scenes of the blasts. The first attacker, wearing a dark blue hooded jacket, detonated a heavy backpack as he approached two police trucks near Kampala's central police station, hitting more than a dozen officers, including some inside the station, Mr. Enanga said.

A second video showed two alleged suicide bombers riding on motorcycles close to the main entrance of Uganda's parliament before setting off their explosives. The blast set several vehicles on fire and sent dozens of law makers scampering for safety. Local authorities switched off electricity supply to buildings in the central business district Tuesday afternoon, citing the possibility of more attacks.

Ugandan police and European security officials have in recent weeks warned about a possible major ADF attack in Kampala, following several smaller bombings in the outskirts of the capital last month.

On Oct. 25, Islamic State said ADF operatives were behind an explosion at a restaurant in a Kampala suburb that killed a waitress the previous day—the first time ISIS claimed responsibility for an attack in Uganda. On Oct. 26, several people were injured when a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device on a bus driving in the outskirts of Kampala.

Police at the time said the perpetrator of the bus attack was also a member of the ADF, although there hasn't been a formal claim of responsibility from ISIS for that bombing. Ugandan police have said they are also investigating possible ADF links to a third bombing, earlier in October, near a police station in northern Kampala. No one was killed or injured during that blast, according to police.

Ugandan police have arrested close to 50 people allegedly tied to the October bombings and warned that ADF operatives were planning to attack major installations in the country.

ISIS has long used Kampala as a transit point for funneling cash to ADF operatives in eastern Congo, according to financial records reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, defectors and African and European security officials. ADF operatives have spent some of the money buying ammonium nitrate and detonators in Kampala to manufacture increasingly sophisticated suicide vests and other improvised explosive devices, the defectors and officials say.

On Oct. 1, Rwandan police said they had arrested several suspected ADF operatives and seized explosive devices meant to be used in an attack in the capital Kigali.

Witnesses said Tuesday's blasts shook many buildings in central Kampala. The U.S. Embassy advised citizens to avoid the area. Police ordered business owners to close shops and shopping malls as they evacuated the city center.

"At first we thought it was an earthquake," said Yahaya Sengendo, a law clerk in central Kampala. "We are now trying to get out of the city as quickly as we can."

Police and rescue workers combed nearby buildings with sniffer dogs as investigators struggled to piece together how the attackers managed to sneak explosives to the district. Hundreds of surveillance cameras equipped with [Huawei Technologies Co.'s facial-recognition technology were installed](#) in the area a few years ago.

"This attack shows the enemy is getting better and more sophisticated," said Kampala's mayor, Salim Uhuru. "This is worrying not just to us in government but to everyone out there."

Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	11/16 Strongest-ever ecstasy pill found in UK
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjb84m/worlds-strongest-ever-ecstasy-pill-found-in-english-nightclub
GIST	<p>Drug analysts have found what is likely to be the world's strongest-ever ecstasy pill, at a club in Manchester in northern England.</p> <p>The record-breaking pill, a “Blue Punisher”, was tested, then re-tested last week by the MANDRAKE drug analysis lab based at Manchester Metropolitan University.</p> <p>The unusually thick, heavy, diamond-shaped blue pill was found to contain 477mg of the psychoactive stimulant drug MDMA – four to five times the usual dose found in ecstasy pills. A dose of 125mg is considered to be a high dose of MDMA, which is also sold in powder and crystal form.</p> <p>The super-strength pill weighed 650mg, which is “significantly heavier than normal” according to MANDRAKE.</p> <p>It was tested as part of a high potency batch of Blue Punisher pills – ranging in MDMA content from 397mg to 477mg – that was seized by bouncers across multiple clubs in Manchester around 10 days ago. Analysts found a total of six pills that contained 477mg of MDMA in one bag at one of the clubs.</p> <p>Blue Punisher pills, which use the skull logo of Marvel anti-hero the Punisher, are frequently found to contain high amounts of MDMA. Extra strong versions of the pills containing 250mg and 300mg were found at festivals in Bristol and Cornwall in 2018. Last week an inquest heard how 19-year-old Harley Girven died after taking two “triple strength” Blue Punisher pills on a night out with friends in 2019.</p> <p>But all the pill testing experts spoken to by VICE World News said the 477mg pills found in Manchester were very likely to be the strongest ecstasy tablets on record.</p> <p>A spokesperson for drugsdata.org, a US-based drug analysis lab which has tested thousands of ecstasy pills from around the world over the last two decades, said the pill was “stronger than any pill recorded on drugsdata.org”. The next strongest pill the lab had previously come across was a purple Philipp Plein skull pill at 366mg found in Vienna, Austria last year.</p> <p>Drug analysis expert Guy Jones from Reagent Tests UK said: “This is a new world record. Impossible to rule out that a stronger one has ever been made, but the number of pills over 400mg with a public test result could be counted on one hand.”</p> <p>Fiona Measham, chair of criminology at the University of Liverpool and director at drug testing NGO, The Loop, said: “It’s likely to be amongst the highest in the world.”</p> <p>She said the extra thickness of the six pills could mean they were produced by mistake.</p> <p>“I’d guess it’s more likely to be a cock-up than intentional. Maybe the boss went out to lunch and the junior was left in charge of the [pill] press and got the consistency wrong. The variations in width [of this batch] suggest the inconsistency of amateur pressing.”</p> <p>Measham said the super strength pill “illustrates just how dangerous the lack of information [about MDMA content of pills] can be”.</p> <p>“The customer doesn’t usually know the strength of ecstasy pills bought on illicit markets and reagent tests can’t help with that. So their life is in danger because of the absence of one simple fact: the MDMA content of the pill they bought. If a customer uses a drug checking service and finds out the strength of a pill is 477mg, then they can simply divide it into quarters and they have 4 average adult doses of MDMA,</p>

with no more risk than any other 120 mg pill. Knowledge is power, but lack of information on strength can transform a pill from benign to deadly.”

In Wales last year pill testing lab Wedinos [found a “Jurassic Park” pill](#) which contained 358mg of MDMA, while in Manchester in June, “Blue Tesla” pills [were found](#) to contain 300mg of MDMA.

Ecstasy pills have been increasing in strength over the last decade, after a drought which left many pills containing no MDMA. By 2014 the average MDMA content of pills [had risen to 108mg](#) and the strongest pill was a 300mg purple “Burger King”. By 2018 the average pill contained between 150-200mg of MDMA, and analysts started to come across [“super pills”](#), such as a skull-shaped tablet containing 360mg tested by the Trimbos Institute, which tests pills in the Netherlands.

Ironically in the UK many drug users have complained about a [post lockdown drought](#) in MDMA, which has caused some batches to contain other stimulants instead of the real thing.

The Trip Report, an early warning system for ecstasy users, has just published its [latest list](#) of high strength and adulterated pills found in Europe.

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HEADLINE	11/16 WA court to decide redistricting plan
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/politics/2021/11/first-court-will-decide-new-wa-redistricting-plan-commission-falters
GIST	<p>For the first time ever, Washington state’s bipartisan redistricting commission has failed to agree on new boundaries for the state’s legislative and congressional districts.</p> <p>Now, it’s up to the state Supreme Court to draw new district maps — a decision that will shape state politics for the next decade.</p> <p>Under state law, the four voting members of the commission had until the end of Monday to decide how to redraw the state’s 10 congressional districts and 49 legislative districts. At least three of the four commissioners needed to agree on a plan.</p> <p>But in a statement issued late Tuesday morning — about 11 hours after its midnight deadline had passed — the commission acknowledged it had failed to adopt a redistricting plan in time, meaning the court will now determine Washington political maps for the next decade.</p> <p>“The late release of the 2020 census data combined with technical challenges hampered the commission's work considerably,” the statement from the commission said.</p> <p>Individual commissioners did not respond to messages Tuesday asking for more details.</p> <p>The state Supreme Court has until April 30, 2022, to decide on a new redistricting plan. That has never happened under the state’s current redistricting system, which Washington voters approved in 1983.</p> <p>Redistricting happens every 10 years, following the release of new population data from the U.S. census. The process at its core is about ensuring all political districts have equal population — but the redrawing of district lines also shapes which political party has the advantage in a given district, as well as whether certain communities’ votes get split and diluted.</p> <p>One major point of discussion has been whether to create a legislative district in the Yakima Valley where most eligible voters are Latino. Matt Barreto, the faculty director of the UCLA Voting Rights Project, said last month that the state commission should create a district in Central Washington that is majority Latino by citizen voting age population, or else risk violating the federal Voting Rights Act.</p>

In advance of Monday's deadline, the two commissioners appointed by Democrats, April Sims and Brady Walkinshaw, said creating a district in the Yakima Valley that complies with the Voting Rights Act was a top priority for them.

The two Republican members of the commission, Joe Fain and Paul Graves, had focused more intently on increasing the [number of politically competitive districts](#), meaning fewer safe seats for Democrats or Republicans. A legal analysis the GOP members commissioned also [disputed that it would be necessary](#) to create a Central Washington district where most eligible voters are Latino.

Other issues at play in the monthslong redistricting discussions included whether to group lower-income, racially diverse communities in south King County in the 9th Congressional District, while removing whiter and wealthier areas such as Mercer Island. Another issue was whether to place the Yakama Nation reservation in a single legislative district instead of two.

The breakdown in the redistricting process was unusual in that, when the commission adjourned just after midnight Monday, it appeared they had, in fact, reached a deal.

On Monday night, commission members had met for nearly five hours out of public view — reportedly in groups of two — emerging only occasionally to give vague progress reports. They then reconvened minutes before their midnight deadline and unanimously approved what Sarah Augustine, the commission's nonvoting chair, called a "final congressional plan" and a "final legislative plan."

It wasn't clear Tuesday what exactly those plans were, or what happened to them after the vote. A commission spokesperson, Jamie Nixon, did not immediately respond to Crosscut's questions about what the commission had actually voted on.

The documents hadn't been posted publicly as of Tuesday afternoon. Nor had the commissioners discussed or debated them in public before voting to send them to the Legislature for final approval. Brad Hendrickson, the secretary of the state Senate, wrote in an email Tuesday that he had received a signed cover letter and resolution from the commission indicating its members had reached an agreement, but no actual maps.

Michele Earl-Hubbard, vice president of the Washington Coalition for Open Government, wrote in an email that the way the commissioners emerged and immediately took action at the end of their meeting with no public discussion suggests they held an illegal meeting out of public view.

That could happen even if the four commissioners were meeting in groups of two, which theoretically wouldn't be enough to create a quorum. Earl-Hubbard said a violation of the state's Open Public Meetings Act can happen when information gets conveyed by intermediaries, even if the commissioners didn't meet all together in secret.

She called it a "serial or daisy chain meeting."

"They screwed up," wrote Earl-Hubbard, an attorney who frequently works on public records cases.

"Plus, it showed the public they were being secretive and had something to hide. They should be open, even if they think they don't need to be. Why do something this important by shutting the public out?" The state's Open Public Meetings Act requires deliberations and discussions — not just final actions — to occur in public. State law dictates that the Redistricting Commission must follow those rules. Redistricting Justice for Washington, a coalition of groups representing communities of color, also expressed disappointment in how the commission went about its work. In a statement Tuesday, the coalition said the commission's final meeting "lacked transparency and was full of confusion."

Additionally, the Redistricting Justice for Washington coalition said it is prepared to take legal action, if necessary, to ensure the state's new redistricting maps comply with the federal Voting Rights Act. In

recent years, voting rights cases brought in the city of Yakima, as well as Yakima County, have led to changes in voting systems that aim to ensure Latino voters can elect their preferred candidates.

Tina Podlodowski, the chair of the state Democratic Party, said she thinks the state Supreme Court will draw fair maps, but probably not ones that will make Republicans happy. She said she doesn't think the draft maps initially proposed by the Republican commissioners would have stood up to a legal challenge under the Voting Rights Act.

Podlodowski said she feels comfortable about the court taking over, even if the commission's failure to reach an agreement is somewhat disappointing.

"I think we have a court that has been infinitely fair in a variety of different decisions," Podlodowski said. "I have full faith in them." State Senate Majority Leader Andy Billig, D-Spokane, released a similar statement expressing his trust in the court.

Caleb Heimlich, the chair of the state Republican Party, didn't immediately respond to an interview request Tuesday. A party spokesperson, Steve Johnson, said GOP officials "are waiting for the dust settle on everything" before commenting.

House Minority Leader J.T. Wilcox, R-Yelm, [suggested on Twitter](#) that the state Supreme Court might care less than the bipartisan commission about keeping sitting legislators in their districts.

While replying to [a former state senator](#) who suggested that the court may end up displacing more incumbents than the commission would have, Wilcox tweeted, "My thought exactly."

That could produce "chaos in some ways," Wilcox wrote.

Until the court finishes the redistricting plan, sitting legislators won't know if they have to run for re-election in the same district or a new one. New candidates, meanwhile, won't know the districts in which they are eligible to run.

That could prove tricky if the Supreme Court takes its time developing new district maps, as the court's April 30 deadline is only about three weeks before the deadline for candidates to decide whether or not to run for office.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Monarch butterflies return to California
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/record-low-monarch-butterflies-return-california-81220394
GIST	<p>PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. -- There is a ray of hope for the vanishing orange-and-black Western monarch butterflies.</p> <p>The number wintering along California's central coast is bouncing back after the population, whose presence is often a good indicator of ecosystem health, reached an all-time low last year. Experts pin their decline on climate change, habitat destruction and lack of food due to drought.</p> <p>An annual winter count last year by the Xerces Society recorded fewer than 2,000 butterflies, a massive decline from the tens of thousands tallied in recent years and the millions that clustered in trees from Northern California's Mendocino County to Baja California, Mexico in the south in the 1980s. Now, their roosting sites are concentrated mostly on California's central coast.</p> <p>This year's official count started Saturday and will last three weeks but already an unofficial count by researchers and volunteers shows there are over 50,000 monarchs at overwintering sites, said Sarina Jepsen, Director of Endangered Species at Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.</p>

“This is certainly not a recovery but we’re really optimistic and just really glad that there are monarchs here and that gives us a bit of time to work toward recovery of the Western monarch migration,” Jepsen said.

Western monarch butterflies head south from the Pacific Northwest to California each winter, returning to the same places and even the same trees, where they cluster to keep warm. The monarchs generally arrive in California at the beginning of November and spread across the country once warmer weather arrives in March.

Monarchs from across the West migrate annually to about 100 wintering sites dotting central California's Pacific coast. One of the best-known wintering places is the Monarch Grove Sanctuary, a city-owned site in the coastal city of Pacific Grove, where last year no monarch butterflies showed up.

The city 70 miles (112 kilometers) south of San Francisco has worked for years to help the declining population of monarch. Known as “Butterfly Town, USA,” the city celebrates the orange and black butterfly with a parade every October. Messing with a monarch is a crime that carries a \$1,000 fine.

“I don’t recall having such a bad year before and I thought they were done. They were gone. They’re not going to ever come back and sure enough, this year, boom, they landed,” said Moe Ammar, president of Pacific Grove Chamber of Commerce.

This year a preliminary count showed more than 13,000 monarchs have arrived at the site in Monterey County, clustering together on pine, cypress and eucalyptus trees and sparking hope among the grove's volunteers and visitors that the struggling insects can bounce back.

Scientists don't know why the population increased this year but Jepsen said it is likely a combination of factors, including better conditions on their breeding grounds.

“Climatic factors could have influenced the population. We could have gotten an influx of monarchs from the eastern U.S., which occasionally can happen, but it’s not known for sure why the population is what it is this year,” she said.

Eastern monarch butterflies travel from southern Canada and the northeastern United States across thousands of miles to spend the winter in central Mexico. Scientists estimate the monarch population in the eastern U.S. has fallen about 80% since the mid-1990s, but the drop-off in the Western U.S. has been even steeper.

The Western monarch butterfly population has declined by more than 99% from the millions that overwintered in California in the 1980s because of the destruction of their milkweed habitat along their migratory route as housing expands into their territory and use of pesticides and herbicides increases.

Researchers also have noted the effect of climate change. Along with farming, climate change is one of the main drivers of the monarch’s threatened extinction, disrupting an annual 3,000-mile (4,828-kilometer) migration synched to springtime and the blossoming of wildflowers.

“California has been in a drought for several years now, and they need nectar sources in order to be able to fill their bellies and be active and survive,” said Stephanie Turcotte Edenholtm, a Pacific Grove Natural History Museum docent who offers guided tours of the sanctuary. “If we don’t have nectar sources and we don’t have the water that’s providing that, then that is an issue.”

Monarch butterflies lack state and federal legal protection to keep their habitat from being destroyed or degraded. Last year, they were denied federal protection but the insects are now among the candidates for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	11/16 Child shot in Snohomish
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/north-sound-news/child-shot-snohomish/OMXK5OBYJRFRDPTDLP2K75QC2A/
GIST	<p>SNOHOMISH, Wash. — A child has been shot in Snohomish, according to the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office.</p> <p>Deputies were called to the 6600 block of 181st Street Southeast for a report of a child with a gunshot wound.</p> <p>According to the Sheriff's Office, the child was out walking her dog when she was wounded.</p> <p>The child's injuries are non-life-threatening.</p> <p>Deputies believe someone may have recklessly discharging a firearm nearby.</p> <p>There is an active search for a suspect.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Academic expert drug-trafficking jailed
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-miami-university-of-miami-5628512a929ad1b73d78a86a4d1169a1
GIST	<p>MIAMI (AP) — For years, Bruce Bagley was the go-to academic expert on drug trafficking in Latin America, sharing his knowledge with Congress, journalists, prominent attorneys and even the Central Intelligence Agency.</p> <p>But in a stunning turn of events, a Manhattan federal judge on Tuesday sentenced the retired University of Miami professor to six months in prison for his role in secretly laundering millions of dollars on behalf of some of the same bad guys he dedicated his life to studying.</p> <p>“I am ashamed of my irresponsible behavior,” Bagley, struggling to hold back tears, told Judge Jed Rakoff while appearing remotely via Zoom. “I have spent my life as an academic working to understand and improve conditions in many countries in Latin America, and to be here today is the greatest departure from the life that I have aspired to.”</p> <p>Rakoff said a sentence of up to five years, as recommended by federal guidelines, would be “irrational” and “overly punitive” for Bagley, who is 75 and in ill health.</p> <p>But he said some prison time, however modest, was required to deter others in positions of authority from engaging in similar behavior.</p> <p>“If there is anyone in the world who knew that this kind of activity was criminal it was Dr. Bagley,” said Rakoff, who recommended Bagley be allowed to complete his sentence at a prison with a good medical facility.</p> <p>Bagley's transition from writing textbooks to carrying out what prosecutors called a “textbook case of money laundering” came from his dealings with another criminal defendant: Colombian businessman Alex Saab, who is accused of paying kickbacks to members of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's family and inner circle to win overvalued state contracts..</p> <p>Bagley was introduced to Saab by a longtime government informant, Jorge Luis Hernández, better known by his nickname Boli. Years earlier, Bagley helped Boli avoid deportation to his native Colombia, where Bagley said he faced a certain death from right-wing paramilitary groups who then dominated drug trafficking along the the Caribbean coast.</p>

At Boli's urging, Saab asked for Bagley's help securing a U.S. visa for his son and later agreed to hire him as a \$1,000-per-hour consultant for an investment in Guatemala. Then starting in late 2017, Bagley began receiving monthly deposits of approximately \$200,000 from a purported food company based in the United Arab Emirates. Additional funds were wired from Switzerland, bringing to nearly \$3 million the amount he collected from Saab, according to prosecutors.

Bagley then transferred 90% of the money into the accounts controlled by the informant, believing they would be forwarded to Saab's U.S. attorneys, who were then secretly meeting with federal investigators to explore a possible resolution of his own case.

Bagley kept a 10% commission for himself and continued to accept the cash even after one of his accounts was closed for suspicious activity.

"Yes. It is corruption," the professor told Boli in one recorded conversation from a December 2018 meeting, adding that he knew Saab was importing food on behalf of the Maduro government. "They have imported the worst quality products with inflated prices, and they have filled their pockets with money."

It's not clear what motivated Boli to betray Bagley. He did not respond to a text message seeking comment.

Prior to his downfall, Bagley had studied organized crime in Latin America for decades. He chaired the University of Miami's Department of International Studies, published numerous books and articles, and was quoted regularly by the media.

"If you are too ostentatious and too public, you attract a great deal of attention," Bagley told The Associated Press in a 2012 interview on drug trafficking in Mexico.

Bagley also served as a consultant to a number of U.S. federal agencies — the FBI, DEA, CIA and the Pentagon — as well as the governments of Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Panama, according to a 24-page resume in court filings.

In seeking leniency, attorneys for Bagley presented him as a cross between an idealistic poverty fighter and an absent-minded professor who would forget to pay a utility bill or run out of gas while driving because he was too absorbed in his research.

But evidence introduced at the last minute by prosecutors presented a darker side.

At the same time Bagley was fielding calls from policy makers in Washington, he and Boli — the informant — were hobnobbing with shady politicians from across Latin America, including presidential aspirants from Paraguay and the Dominican Republic, as well as a Colombian governor, Kiko Gomez, then under criminal investigation for homicide.

In 2015, Bagley signed an affidavit in which he affirmed that Gomez had no ties with right-wing paramilitary groups. But in a sentencing memo seeking leniency, lawyers for Bagley said he had refused to sign such an affidavit despite being offered \$25,000 because his academic research had led him to conclude that the politician was indeed tied to the militias, which are designated a terrorist organization by the U.S.

"Either Bagley's representation about his research in his sentencing submission is false, or he signed a false affidavit in 2015," prosecutors argued in a filing late last week. "In either event, the Government respectfully submits that Bagley's misrepresentations are relevant to the Court's determination of the appropriate sentence to impose."

Bagley's attorneys said the document was based on only initial findings and that Bagley refused to provide a more in-depth report of the kind sought by Gomez.

HEADLINE	11/17 Gun-control support drops amid crime rise
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/gun-control-support-drops-amid-growing-crime-and-firearm-purchases-11637139601?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>Americans' support for stricter gun-control measures has fallen to its lowest level since 2014, according to a poll released Wednesday by Gallup.</p> <p>The results of the October survey come as the number of violent crimes, including murder, has risen and after Americans purchased a record number of guns in 2020.</p> <p>According to the poll, 52% of U.S. adults say they want stricter gun laws—down from 67% in 2018 after a mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Fla., left 17 people dead. Democrats overwhelmingly support stricter measures in the recent survey, while 24% of Republicans do; 11% of U.S. adults polled say they want less-restrictive laws.</p> <p>The percentage of Americans who support a ban on the possession of handguns fell to 19%, the lowest rate ever recorded by Gallup. Support peaked at 60% when Gallup first asked the question in 1959. The highest recorded rates of support that Gallup found for stricter gun-control laws were in the 1990s.</p> <p>The number of homicides in the U.S. rose nearly 30% in 2020 from the prior year to 21,570, the largest single-year increase ever recorded by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The violent-crime rate rose 5.2% last year compared with the previous year, while the property-crime rate dipped 8.1%, according to the FBI.</p> <p>Gallup found that 88% of U.S. gun owners now say they own a gun to protect themselves against crime, up from two-thirds in 2005.</p> <p>Jeffrey M. Jones, a senior editor at Gallup, said that along with crime, the election of a president who has called for new gun laws contributed to the declining support for gun-control measures.</p> <p>Following a string of mass shootings this spring, President Biden called on Congress to pass sweeping new gun restrictions. They included an expansion of background checks for people seeking to buy guns and a ban on semiautomatic weapons with high-capacity magazines, such as AR-15-style rifles. He also ordered new rules for untraceable weapons known as ghost guns and arm braces used to steady AR-style pistols. Congress hasn't passed any new gun laws.</p> <p>The Gallup survey found that 31% of U.S. adults say they own a gun, a number that has remained little changed for more than a decade.</p> <p>The number of federal background checks for gun purchases hit an all-time high in 2020 of 21 million, according to an analysis of federal data by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, an industry trade group.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 Unease: waiting; Rittenhouse trial verdict
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/16/kyle-rittenhouse-trial-wait-for-verdict
GIST	<p>After the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse, who as a 17-year-old fatally shot two men and wounded a third, finally closed and the jury was sent out to deliberate its verdict, a crowd of supporters stood outside the Kenosha county courthouse volleying chants in the cold November dark.</p> <p>“Black Lives Matter!” one group shouted.</p> <p>“Self-defense is not a crime!” the other responded.</p>

The dueling chants crystallize [what the trial has come to represent](#) for the millions of people watching the case in Wisconsin and across America. To some, it's a case of a gun-wielding teenager who responded to racial unrest by taking justice into his own hands and shooting three anti-racist protesters – two fatally. To others, Rittenhouse used his weapon in self-defense after he was attacked by members of a violent crowd.

As the sun rose on Tuesday above nearby Lake Michigan, the case headed to the 12 jurors who will determine what it represents in the eyes of the law. It has not unfolded smoothly, as the prosecution seems to have botched some of its witnesses and arguments and the presiding judge's behavior has been erratic and at times betrayed an apparent sympathy to the defense.

Rittenhouse is charged with reckless homicide, intentional homicide and attempted intentional homicide. He has pleaded not guilty to all counts.

Meanwhile, the city of Kenosha remains on standby hoping to avoid the violence that erupted in August 2020. Last week, Wisconsin's governor, Tony Evers, mobilized 500 national guard members to assist local law enforcement should they be needed.

"There's a sense of unease out here as we wait for the verdict. We've been waiting on a verdict ever since [Rittenhouse] did the shootings," said a man outside the courthouse who identified as Xavier S and traveled from nearby Racine to show solidarity with Jacob Blake.

Blake was shot seven times in the back by a Kenosha police officer and left paralyzed from the waist down. Blake's uncle, Justin, told the Guardian earlier this month that the past year had been a "living hell" for his family.

Kristan T Harris, an independent citizen-journalist whose footage of last year's deadly protest was used as evidence at Rittenhouse's trial, said as he left the courthouse on Monday that regardless of the verdict he did not expect to see anything like the scenes he witnessed filming the protests that played out in August 2020.

"How many people want to go out and protest in 30-degree weather?" he said. "There might be demonstrations, but I don't think they will be as big. People are back to work. Last year, everyone was furloughed."

In an earlier interview, Harris described the chaos that unfolded a year ago, detailing crowds of roving protesters who uprooted street lights and a "handful of cops up against what looked like a huge rock concert's worth of people decked out in riot gear".

Harris caught on film the moment a police officer collapsed after a thrown brick appeared to hit him on the head and knock him unconscious. Harris was also on scene nights later, when he said police pushed protesters toward a crowd of armed and agitated citizens who claimed they were standing guard to protect property.

It was that police decision, he said, that set in motion the violence that followed.

"That was the first choice which kind of dominoed and led to the tragedy of August 25," Harris said. "Nobody had to die that night."

Harris has covered demonstrations in various cities, including the protests in Minneapolis that followed George Floyd's murder, but said he never "thought Kenosha would be the city that would capture America".

But the outcome was less surprising to Dayvin Hallmon, who for 10 years served on the Kenosha county board of supervisors.

For years, Hallmon said, he warned other board members that Kenosha, which is 80% white, was moving toward a racial reckoning after meeting with frustrated young people to hear their concerns.

“I issued a number of warnings to them about where they were headed if they didn’t address the needs of people of color. They were asked to pass a resolution against hate and violence and said no. They were asked to rewrite the rules for police and sheriff engagement. They said no,” said Hallmon.

“Nobody on the county board cared. Everything that happened with Rittenhouse and Jacob Blake was totally foreseeable and preventable,” he added.

Omar Flores, a member of the Milwaukee Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression who met Hallmon when he started organizing, backs the former county board member’s statements.

“He predicted Kenosha would be the hub of an uprising one day. We all made fun of him for it, but he was right,” Flores said.

Flores, who identifies as Latino and who grew up in Kenosha, describes the city as a conservative place where police target people of color, who in turn think twice before vocalizing the need for change.

He recalls people throwing trash at him – and one man brandishing a Confederate flag – the day in 2014 when he hosted a rally to express solidarity with Ferguson.

“We sort of adopt this mentality that if you just sort of put your head down and try and act like the rest, you’re going to be left alone,” Flores said.

Flores worries that mentality will keep young people of color from organizing in Kenosha and challenging the status quo. Still, he has noticed more people of color becoming bolder and more vocal over the past year – an encouraging sign, he said.

“I do think that seeds are being planted. I think people’s perspectives are changing because of what’s happened with the trial,” he said.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Police fatally shoot girl; teens face murder
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/us/fanta-bility-police-shooting.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=US%20News
GIST	<p>It began, prosecutors say, when two teenage boys, carrying a grudge between them and the guns to settle it, exchanged gunfire outside a high school football stadium just as a game was winding down in the suburbs of Philadelphia.</p> <p>It ended with the death of an 8-year-old girl named Fanta Bility — killed not by the two boys, but by a barrage of bullets unleashed by three police officers on the scene, who began firing toward a car they mistakenly believed was the source of the gunshots.</p> <p>Now, more than two months after the fatal police shooting that shook the small town of Sharon Hill, criminal charges have been brought in the case — but not against the three officers. The two teenage boys have been charged with first-degree murder for setting in motion the events that led to the death of the girl, a daughter of West African immigrants who was attending the game to watch her sister, a cheerleader, and her cousin, one of the football players.</p> <p>The decision by prosecutors to charge the two teenagers, even though they did not fire the shot that killed the girl, while allowing the police officers involved to keep their jobs, has stirred outrage in the community and angered her family who worry that the police will ultimately evade accountability.</p>

The charges rely on a legal theory known as “transferred intent,” which prosecutors believe applies in this case because they say the two teenagers had intended to kill each other, and the result of their actions was Fanta’s death. But experts say prosecutors are stretching the definition of “transferred intent” and could have difficulty making the charges stand up in court.

Prosecutors say that the police role in Fanta’s death is still under investigation and that a grand jury will begin reviewing the case on Nov. 18 “so that it may be determined whether the police officers’ use of deadly force was justified,” District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer of Delaware County said in a statement.

“I ask for the community’s continued patience as the grand jury undertakes its investigation,” he said.

Philip M. Stinson, a professor of criminal justice at Bowling Green State University who studies police violence, said, “It sounds like a lot of smoke and mirrors to deflect from police accountability.” He added, “It makes no sense to shoot into a moving vehicle.”

Bruce L. Castor Jr., the lawyer for the Bility family, who has filed a lawsuit on its behalf against the city of Sharon Hill and its police department, said the girl’s parents were angered to see the charges against the teenagers. He said the family believed that the charges were a smoke screen designed to shield the police from legal consequences for killing Fanta. (The family, through Mr. Castor, declined to comment.)

Mr. Castor, a former acting attorney general of Pennsylvania who was one of former President Donald J. Trump’s defense lawyers during his second impeachment trial, said he believed that a conviction of the two teenagers would be difficult at trial.

“I’m surprised that the district attorney was that aggressive but I certainly wish him well,” Mr. Castor said. “I don’t immediately see how the doctrine of transferred intent applies under these circumstances.”

The shootings began on the evening of Aug. 27 just as the last minutes were ticking off the clock of the season-opening football game at Academy Park High School. Spectators were already streaming for the exits. On the radio, the announcer was giving the final score — a 42-0 win for the home team — when bursts of gunfire could be heard. On the field, players hit the ground seeking safety.

Prosecutors say a dispute had erupted during the game between the two boys — one 16, the other 18 — and their group of friends. They say one of them flashed a gun nestled in his waistband as he left the game and later pulled it out and began shooting toward the other group of teenagers. The other boy, having run to his car to retrieve a 9-millimeter Taurus pistol, returned fire and wounded a bystander, a witness told investigators.

A group of police officers, about 140 feet away, fired 25 shots in return, killing Fanta and wounding three other people, including an older sister.

The gunfight between the two teenagers, Mr. Stollsteimer said in the statement, “precipitated the responsive discharge of weapons by police officers stationed near the entrance to the football stadium.”

The case, experts say, reflects one of the less-discussed ways that the law can shield the police from accountability — when officers kill someone but murder charges are brought against others who were on the scene and may have participated in separate criminal acts that instigated the police response.

“The main issue here is that the police were negligent and breached their duty by showing up and shooting into a crowd,” said Dan Kozieja, of Delco Resists, a local social justice organization formed last year in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd. “Now they are trying to take the easy route out by pinning this murder on two young boys rather than taking accountability for their actions.”

BuzzFeed News, in [an investigation published in August](#), reported on several similar cases around the country. Often in these cases, prosecutors invoked the so-called felony murder rule, which in some states

allows for murder charges against someone who committed a felony that resulted in death, even if the person had no intent of killing someone.

In one case, in 2019 in Phoenix, police officers pulled over a car because they suspected the four occupants of committing a robbery. When one of them fled, the police shot him dead. The three others were charged with murder, while the police were not held accountable.

As the legal process plays out, State Senator Anthony H. Williams, whose district includes Sharon Hill, has asked for calm.

Mr. Williams said he felt “blindsided” and “betrayed” when the charges were announced, since he said he had been in discussions about the case with the district attorney’s office.

“They were not the individuals who shot the little girl,” he said. “How in God’s name you can go from not charging individuals who were involved to charging individuals who were not involved is an exclamation point for the system to be changed. Not reformed, but to be dramatically changed. It’s mind-boggling.”

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HEADLINE	11/16 Maryland mayor arrested; revenge porn
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/us/revenge-porn-andrew-bradshaw-mayor.html
GIST	<p>The mayor of a city on Maryland’s Eastern Shore was arrested on Monday and accused of posting nude photographs of a former romantic partner in online forums using sexually explicit language and racial epithets.</p> <p>Andrew Bradshaw, the mayor of Cambridge, Md., was charged with 50 counts of violating a state law banning so-called revenge porn, or the nonconsensual sharing of sexually explicit photos or videos.</p> <p>The state prosecutor’s office said Mr. Bradshaw, 32, had posted images of his former partner without her consent in April and May on Reddit, where users share and comment on links in subject-specific forums.</p> <p>The charges against Mr. Bradshaw were the latest in a series of high-profile revenge porn cases in recent years, and groups that support survivors of sexual violence say there has been an increase in reports of revenge porn and other forms of online sexual harassment during the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>Aaron Coleman was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives last year after admitting that he had harassed girls online while he was in middle school. This month, Mr. Coleman, a Democrat, was arrested and charged with domestic battery.</p> <p>Katie Hill, a Democratic former congresswoman from California, resigned in October 2019 after nude photos she said had been taken of her without her consent were posted online.</p> <p>And in 2017, the Defense Department opened an investigation into an all-male, invitation-only Facebook group called Marines United, in which members shared thousands of nude and other private photos of Marine Corps women without their knowledge or consent.</p> <p>The Maryland state prosecutor, Charlton T. Howard III, said in a charging document that Mr. Bradshaw had posted nude photographs of his former partner in several Reddit groups, or subreddits, and had written comments that were degrading and sexually explicit and included racial epithets.</p> <p>The photos were posted by accounts that had public user names made up of combinations of the victim’s name and birth date, Mr. Howard said. She is not named in the charging document and is instead identified as Victim 1.</p> <p>She told the authorities about the posts in May, according to the charging document, and said that the only person she had shared the photos with was Mr. Bradshaw. Prosecutors said they had connected the posts to an internet protocol address at his home.</p>

Mr. Bradshaw [defeated a three-term incumbent](#) in a runoff election in December and was sworn in as mayor of Cambridge, which has a population of about 13,000, in January.

Michael Belsky, a lawyer for Mr. Bradshaw, said: “The allegations against Mayor Bradshaw involve private matters that are unfortunately playing themselves out in a public forum. Nothing about the allegations in any way affect Mayor Bradshaw’s desire and intent to continue to lead all the citizens of Cambridge.”

Mr. Bradshaw was arrested and released on his own recognizance on Monday, according to court documents. He faces a maximum penalty of 100 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 if convicted on all counts.

Reddit bans users from posting nude photos without the subject’s permission. A representative said the company was investigating the incident and would remove any related content that violated its policies. The city of Cambridge said in a statement that its business would not be affected by the case because the head of its administrative business is the city manager, not the mayor.

Lisae C. Jordan, the executive director of the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, said the case against Mr. Bradshaw was a “vivid example” of the type of harassment survivors are describing as reports of revenge porn and online harassment have surged during the pandemic.

“More and more, we’re seeing people being faced with revenge porn, sexual exploitation with online sexual harassment,” Ms. Jordan said.

The landscape for revenge porn cases has shifted significantly over the past decade. In 2013, three states had criminalized nonconsensual pornography. Today, 48 states have done so, said Mary Anne Franks, the president and legislative and tech policy director at the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative. Maryland’s revenge porn law went into effect in 2014.

Dr. Franks said Maryland’s law, like others in the United States, was too restrictive because, to convict someone, prosecutors must prove that the person who shared the photos intended to cause serious emotional distress.

That standard can protect people who say they posted photos for profit, to improve standing in their community or because they didn’t think the individual in the photo would care, Dr. Franks said. Prosecutors might have an easier time proving malicious intent in Mr. Bradshaw’s case, she said, because of the breadth and cruelty of the posts prosecutors accused him of making.

“What’s so troubling about these kinds of crimes is they can’t really be undone in any way,” Dr. Franks said. “You can’t compensate a victim afterward. You can’t really give her back what she has lost.”

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HEADLINE	11/16 FBI tracks threats against school officials
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/us/politics/fbi-school-threats.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The F.B.I. has begun to track threats against school administrators, teachers and board members to assess the extent of the problem, part of the Justice Department’s effort to grapple with the heated and occasionally violent clashes over culture war issues like the teaching of racism and mask requirements.</p> <p>Last month the F.B.I. created a “threat tag” to apply to reports of threats, harassment and violence against school officials, to comply with a memo sent by Attorney General Merrick B. Garland, according to a directive issued on Oct. 20 to the bureau’s criminal and counterterrorism divisions that House Republicans made public on Tuesday.</p>

Such tags are used by the bureau to track trends and share information across offices, and are commonly used for crimes like drug offenses and human trafficking, the bureau said.

Republicans in Congress have seized on the Justice Department's focus on threats of violence toward school administrators, teachers and school board members to buttress their contention that the Biden administration and Democrats are seeking to intimidate or silence parents who object to local school policies.

Some Republicans have suggested that the participation of the F.B.I.'s counterterrorism division in the effort indicates that the administration is equating parents with terrorists, an assertion that Mr. Garland has dismissed as baseless.

Similarly, the F.B.I. said on Tuesday that the creation of a threat-tracking system for school-related issues was intended to deter violence, not to silence or intimidate parents with strongly held views.

"The creation of a threat tag in no way changes the longstanding requirements for opening an investigation, nor does it represent a shift in how the F.B.I. prioritizes threats," the bureau said in a statement.

"The attorney general's memorandum simply underscores the F.B.I.'s ongoing efforts to assist state, local and federal partners to address threats of violence, regardless of the motivation," the statement said. "The F.B.I. has never been in the business of investigating parents who speak out or policing speech at school board meetings, and we are not going to start now."

Republican lawmakers have [excoriated Mr. Garland](#) for issuing [a memo](#) on Oct. 4 that directed the F.B.I. and the 94 U.S. attorneys' offices to meet with local law enforcement agencies by early November to discuss how to address the threats against school officials and to open "dedicated lines of communication for threat reporting, assessment and response."

The Justice Department also said that it would begin "a series of additional efforts in the coming days designed to address the rise in criminal conduct directed toward school personnel," including a task force that would include the U.S. attorneys' offices, the F.B.I., the criminal division, the national security division and the civil rights division.

During oversight hearings last month, Republicans cast the effort as an attack on parents who criticized issues like mask mandates, curriculum about race and policies regarding gender issues. As the debates have become more heated, [physical fights](#), arrests, [disorderly conduct](#) and [threats](#) against school officials have increasingly made headlines.

Some Republicans said the memo had a decidedly political cast, as it was issued just days after public school board leaders asked President Biden in a letter to address safety issues at schools. The educators who wrote the letter later apologized for some of its inflammatory language, including a comparison between protesting parents and domestic terrorists.

Several Republicans on the House and Senate Judiciary Committees said that the directive to look at harassment and threats — especially one that involved the department's counterterrorism division — echoed the very language that the educators had retracted and could have a chilling effect on parents who wish to voice complaints, even if that was not the intent.

Mr. Garland has denied creating his initiative to appease the White House, and he reiterated several times that his directive was meant only to address violence and threats of violence, and that the department would not crack down on free speech.

Nevertheless, a Justice Department whistle-blower recently shared the bureau's memo about the new threat tag with Republican lawmakers, Representative Jim Jordan of Ohio, the top Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, wrote in [a letter to Mr. Garland](#) on Tuesday.

	<p>Republicans suggested that the memo, which directed the F.B.I.'s counterterrorism division to use the tag when investigating possible instances of school violence, showed that Mr. Garland had not been completely accurate when he testified before them last month.</p> <p>Mr. Garland testified that he could not imagine a circumstance in which parents "would be labeled as domestic terrorists" and that he did not think that "parents getting angry at school boards for whatever reason constitute domestic terrorism."</p> <p>"It's not even a close question," he said.</p> <p>In its statement on Tuesday, the F.B.I. said that the bureau's criminal investigative division and the counterterrorism division shared responsibility for violent threats. "Before either division can open an investigation, there must be information indicating the potential use of force or violence and a potential violation of federal law," the bureau said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/16 New wrinkle in Ghislaine Maxwell trial
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/16/nyregion/ghislaine-maxwell-trial-epstein-judge.html
GIST	<p>The Manhattan judge presiding in the high-profile trial of Ghislaine Maxwell, the longtime associate of Jeffrey Epstein, will be recommended to the White House on Tuesday evening for a prestigious federal appeals court post by Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, his office said.</p> <p>The judge, Alison J. Nathan, 49, has spent a decade on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. On Tuesday, she was overseeing jury selection in the trial of Ms. Maxwell, who has been charged with sex trafficking and with helping Mr. Epstein recruit, groom and ultimately sexually abuse girls. Ms. Maxwell has pleaded not guilty.</p> <p>The trial, in which opening arguments are scheduled for Nov. 29, could last six weeks, defense lawyers and prosecutors have said in court filings.</p> <p>If Judge Nathan is nominated by President Biden and confirmed by the Senate during the trial, she could still continue to preside in the case, two legal ethics experts said. Judges are frequently elevated to appeals courts from lower courts where they are actively involved in trials and other cases.</p> <p>Still, the Maxwell trial, with its connection to Mr. Epstein and the worldwide attention it has attracted, is anything but a routine matter.</p> <p>Asked whether Judge Nathan would stay on the case if nominated for the appellate judgeship, Edward Friedland, a spokesman for the District Court, said in a statement that he could "neither confirm nor deny that she is under consideration."</p> <p>"But I have every reason to believe that if she is recommended or nominated she would — as is customary for lower court judges who are nominated to higher courts — continue to do her day job and preside over the trial to its conclusion," Mr. Friedland said.</p> <p>Mr. Schumer, the Democratic majority leader and the party's senior lawmaker in New York State, is recommending Judge Nathan for a seat on the influential U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, which is one level below the Supreme Court.</p> <p>The recommendation means Judge Nathan is almost certain to be nominated by the White House, as presidents, in choosing judges and U.S. attorneys, traditionally defer to their party's senior lawmaker in each state.</p>

Mr. Schumer, in a statement on Tuesday, said Judge Nathan’s “experience, legal brilliance, love of the rule of law and perspective would be invaluable in ensuring the federal judiciary fulfills its obligation to ensure equal justice for all.”

Mr. Schumer’s office also noted that Judge Nathan would be the second openly gay woman to serve on the Second Circuit.

Judge Nathan was appointed to the District Court by President Barack Obama in 2011. She earlier served as a special counsel to the solicitor general of New York State, in the state attorney general’s office. Before that, she was an associate White House counsel and special assistant to Mr. Obama.

Judge Nathan is a graduate of Cornell Law School and served as a law clerk to Justice John Paul Stevens in the Supreme Court’s 2001-2 term.

It is not unprecedented for a federal appellate judge, even after confirmation, to continue to hear cases in the trial court, the legal experts said.

At least two former judges on the District Court in Manhattan — Denny Chin and Richard J. Sullivan — continued to handle cases in the lower court after they were appointed to the Second Circuit.

Rebecca Roiphe, a professor at New York Law School, said the only theoretical issue she could foresee would be if Judge Nathan were confirmed quickly and her new duties pulled her away “from a very time-consuming trial.”

“But I think that’s unlikely given the timeline here,” Professor Roiphe said.

Stephen Gillers, a professor at New York University School of Law, said one hypothetical question was whether Ms. Maxwell’s lawyers might seek to have the judge recuse herself because the Biden administration would be in a position to derail her promotion if she did not favor the government in the trial.

But he said in his view, based on hundreds of cases involving judicial recusal, a promotion like Judge Nathan’s would not provide a basis for such a request.

“This does not even come close to the sort of interest that leads to recusal,” he said.

Judge Nathan is known for her independence, and in at least two cases she issued blistering criticism of the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Manhattan after it was accused of failing to turn over potentially favorable evidence to the defense before trial.

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HEADLINE	11/16 Mexico captures wife of violent cartel leader
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexico-arrests-wife-jalisco-generation-cartel-81205322
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Mexican soldiers have captured the wife of the leader of the Jalisco New Generation cartel, authorities said Tuesday.</p> <p>In a joint statement, the Attorney General’s Office, Defense Department and National Intelligence Center said that Rosalinda “N” was captured Monday in Zapopan, Jalisco. It said she was allegedly involved in the illicit finances of organized crime in Jalisco.</p> <p>A federal official, commenting about the case on condition of anonymity, said the woman arrested was Rosalinda González Valencia, the wife of Jalisco cartel leader Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera.</p> <p>The government said the arrest was “a significant hit” against the cartel’s financial structure.</p> <p>González Valencia was previously arrested in May 2018, but later released.</p>

Mike Vigil, former international operations chief for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, called González Valencia a “narco queen,” whose family has long been tied to drug trafficking.

“She has all of the keys, all of the confidence of ‘El Mencho,’ all of the information and was responsible for laundering the cartel’s money,” Vigil said.

He noted that her arrest comes while two of their children are jailed in the United States. Jessica Johanna Oseguera Gonzalez, a dual U.S. and Mexican citizen, was sentenced in June to 2 1/2 years in prison for involvement in businesses laundering money for the cartel.

Her brother, Rubén, known as “El Menchito,” has pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking charges, but remains jailed awaiting trial.

Taking that into account, Vigil suspects their mother could be interested “in negotiating some deal to help her children.”

The Jalisco cartel is arguably Mexico’s most powerful and violent. It made its reputation with brazen attacks on Mexico’s security forces, including an assassination attempt on Mexico City’s police chief last year in the capital, that wounded him and left three people dead. In 2015, cartel gunmen shot down a Mexican military helicopter with a rocket-propelled grenade.

It has ruthlessly expanded its territory beyond Jalisco, spurring bloodshed in states including Guanajuato and Michoacan, as well as reaching its tentacles into Mexico’s Caribbean beach resorts in Quintana Roo.

The cartel’s main business is trafficking drugs to the United States, especially methamphetamine and fentanyl.

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